

# The Culture of People's Democracy

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# The Culture of People's Democracy

Hungarian Essays on Literature, Art, and Democratic  
Transition, 1945–1948

*By*

György Lukács

*Edited and translated by*

Tyrus Miller



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## **The Phantom of Liberty: György Lukács and the Culture of 'People's Democracy'**

### **I**

In 1992, the veteran-artist of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, Tamás Szentjóbby, presented the residents and tourists of Budapest with the surprising sight of a public-art project entitled 'Project for a Statue of the Soul of Liberty'.<sup>1</sup> Atop the hillside on the Buda side of the Danube, the Liberty statue installed under Soviet occupation in 1947 and consisting of a sculptural group with an allegorical female figure of liberty at its centre was now completely wrapped in a white fabric, rendering it a ghost-like figure hovering above the Hungarian metropolis. The prominence of the monument and its own complicated history added layers of meaning to Szentjóbby's ambiguous gesture. Urban legend had it that the statue actually originated in a planned, but unbuilt wartime-memorial to the son of Hungary's authoritarian leader, Miklós Horthy; its design, it was rumoured, had been disinterred to meet the pressing deadline imposed by the Soviet authorities – another token of the popular theory that the so-called liberation from fascism had been, in the end, a simple change of the oppressor's uniform and insignia. During the years of socialism in Hungary, the sculptural group had included Soviet soldiers and an inscription celebrating the country's liberation by the Red Army. Following the 1989 'political changes', the inscription was revised to a more generically national sentiment and the sculptural group reduced to two figures, the female liberty-figure and a male figure throttling the serpent of tyranny. Literally wrapping up this petrified history of the past 45 years, Szentjóbby's intervention in 1992 was partly an exorcism: disenchanting, through ostentatious literalisation, Marx's notorious 'spectre of communism haunting Europe'. But, in equal measure, it was sceptically interrogative and disenchanted about the brave new order of liberal capitalism that had come to the ex-Soviet bloc as well. Implicitly, with a nod to Luis Buñuel's

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1. For more detailed consideration of this project, see Boros 2001, pp. 85–7.

film 'The Phantom of Liberty', Szentjóbby was asking whether the democratic liberty that had raised such hopes across East-Central Europe after the fall of state-socialism might not also prove little more than a haunting apparition – spectral as a phantom and fleeting as a sheet cast up in the wind. (Notably, we might add, his work met with considerable, negative, public reaction at the time, even as it has become something of a classic of post-socialist public art retrospectively.)

It might seem ironic to suggest that the concept of 'people's democracy', and, underlying it, the pretence of popular-republican sovereignty as it existed in Hungary between the fall of fascism and the clear dictatorial turn in 1948, might analogously be a fleeting moment in which 'the phantom of liberty' made an earlier haunting appearance in the skies over Budapest. After all, by 1989, nothing could appear more discredited than the democratic credentials of those Eastern bloc and Asian 'democratic republics' dominated by the USSR and China, or the putatively popular or democratic character of the so-called 'people's democracies'. In Central Europe, in any case, rapid Sovietisation and the systematic dismantling of the briefly pluralistic popular-front governments of reconstruction crushed most illusions about the role the people had been assigned to play in the 'people's democracies' that remained after 1948. Even the subsequent rebellions that occurred in Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland; even the occasional cracks and breaks that appeared in the Soviet bloc; and even the most serious post-Stalinist attempts at liberalisation never came close to restoring the fleeting historical chance at a new conception of European democracy that had been ventured – including, in some cases, by sincere, committed Communists – and lost. And, yet, our knowledge of the historical outcome, our certainty about the determinative role of a Stalinist Soviet Union and its representatives in the 'liberated' countries, as well as the dubious motivations of some of the key actors on all sides, so strongly colour our view of the postwar years that when we attempt to understand the perspectives of the moment through contemporary eyes, we tend to overlook how much principled belief, sincere wishful thinking, and sheer uncertainty also influenced the events of 1945–8.

Recognising the differences between the pace and process of Sovietisation in different countries, and focusing my remarks on Hungary, the first factor to consider in this regard is negative. The principal actors, Communists and non-Communists alike, were operating, even more than is normal in political and cultural-political life, in an environment of uncertainty. Although many historians have seen the period of 1945–8 as a process of step-by-step implementation of a pre-existing plan drawn up in Moscow, there are reasons to believe that the actions of the Soviets, much less their local minions, were



much more improvisatory, mutable, and ad hoc. The Soviets did not know and did not always accurately gauge the international situation, for instance the political strength of the Western-European Communist parties, which critically affected their actions in East-Central Europe. The local Communists, in turn, could not always discern the desires and intentions of their Soviet masters, assuming that there even was a clearly formulated view in Moscow; and, in any case, years of tutelage under Stalinism had prepared them to keep things vague and flexible in case of potentially perilous tactical turns. And both Communists and non-Communists operated under the assumption, obviously interpreted with varying degrees of hope and fear, that the Red Army could very well be withdrawn in 1948, as had been asserted by the Soviet leadership and as had been formally foreseen in the postwar-negotiation of a peace agreement. As Peter Kenez writes in his recent, admirably judicious history of the 'establishment of the Communist régime in Hungary': 'Although many people at the time had serious concerns about the future, it was not at all naïve to believe that at the conclusion of the peace treaty Soviet troops would leave Hungary, and then a democratic régime might let roots down and firmly establish itself. The non-Communist parties based their policies on this expectation, and the Communists feared that their opponents might be right, in which case they would have the frightening prospect of being left without Soviet protection.'<sup>2</sup>

This negative condition – the principal actors' lack of certainty about their historical moment and the forces that would prove determinate in a short period – is crucial for understanding the nature and value of what I will characterise as the positive condition for this 'phantom of liberty' to spring up under the aegis of people's democracy in this period: that is, a sincere, principled attempt to articulate a new basis for politics and culture on popular, democratic grounds. The exercise of democracy in postwar Hungarian political and cultural life was, to be sure, limited and distorted from the outset by the dictates of the occupying Soviet authorities, the tactical machinations of the Communist leadership, the unlawful conduct of the Communist-controlled police- and security-apparatus, the war-devastation and appalling conditions of everyday life, and the crushing demands for reparations by the Soviet Union – which at first appeared far more bent on the rapid looting of a defeated enemy's remaining resources than creating a working economic satellite integrated into its system. Yet, despite such unfavourable conditions, contemporaries felt that new constructive energies *had* been released by the fall of fascism, the prospects of democracy, the formal declaration of a

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2. Kenez 2006, p. 5.

republic (after a quarter-century of nominal monarchy without a king), and the granting of long-withheld reforms to the genuinely oppressed lower classes of interwar Hungary. There was an inspiring new wave of political, literary, artistic, and paedagogical activism across the political spectrum in the first few years after the War, and it is in this context that I wish to consider the writings of György Lukács from this period.

This context provides, as it were, a degree of positive light on a set of writings that are, without question, compromised by the dictatorial developments that were already partially being prepared in the immediate postwar years and would come to fruition after 1948 – compromised despite the fact that Lukács himself and his postwar writings were under sharp attack as a direct result of the accelerated Sovietisation that occurred after 1948. It is all too easy to cast Lukács's role as a sort of learned dupe, at least in part willing, of the Hungarian Communist Party's leadership, which was happy to exploit for their own ends Lukács's domestic and international prestige, his intellectual heavyweight status, and his long-standing friendships with respected literary and cultural figures. Yet any closer examination of Lukács's life and works belies this interpretation; the story is too simple, and by this point in his career, he can hardly be viewed as an innocent lamb fallen among masquerading wolves. Lukács was a dedicated and experience-hardened Communist, who had survived in exile for twenty-five years through numerous dangerous turns in Communist policy; he must have known quite well what sort of men he was dealing with, when it came to the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party, the likes of Matyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, József Révai, and Mihály Farkas. At the same time, however, I also believe that Lukács's writings of this period adopt, as a fundamental assumption from which all else follows, the idea that the Communist Party in Hungary would for a long period remain one political and cultural force among others in a pluralistic, popular-front institutional arrangement. And it is likely that a key-part of his understanding of 'people's democracy' as a long-term transitional arrangement was that he too believed, and perhaps even desired, that the Red Army would take its leave as promised in 1948. Given the modest and disappointing election-results the Communists received in the relatively free elections of 1945–7, Lukács concluded that a long, deep process of cultural education and persuasion – including a much deeper cultural and political education of the presently crude and callow ranks of the Communist Party – would be necessary. The writings I have translated in this volume are, I believe, best understood as a record of the efforts Lukács undertook in light of this conclusion about the long-range horizon of expectations for people's democracy and the role of the Communists within it. Adding credibility to this more positive

interpretation is that despite the new context in which Lukács applied his ideas, they were essentially consonant with the world-view and cultural conclusions that he had already formed during the period of the anti-fascist 'Popular Front' of the 1930s, during which he produced some of his most important scholarly writings *and* practical interventions into literary politics. Although the Popular Front as a Communist Party policy had its sham elements – it coincided in a few decisive years with the purge-trials, a frenzy of internal terror in the USSR, and ultimately the Stalin-Hitler pact – and although Lukács's writings of the period are not without their own acquiescence to high Stalinism, there can also be no question that the Popular Front represented Lukács's long-term, organic political and cultural outlook, extending in different forms from the mid-1930s to the end of his life. Lukács's work from the mid-1930s onwards was predicated on basic Popular Front premises: the necessity of alliances of a wide range of progressive forces against fascism and reaction; the importance of the progressive, popular cultural heritage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European culture in articulating these alliances on the basis of common understanding; the participation of Communists in coalitions and organisations that pursued progressive, but not necessarily socialistic ends; and the importance of linking intellectual life with the social activity of the popular masses. These were not merely tactical considerations for Lukács, and certainly not merely masks for advancing the narrow goals of Communist-Party control. They were axioms of his whole theoretical and practical activity, to which he adhered with principled stubbornness even as the tactic of Popular-Front politics fell out of favour with the Cominform (the postwar-successor of the Comintern, which had been temporarily disbanded in 1943 to re-assure Stalin's wartime allies) and the Hungarian Communist leadership after 1948.

To sum up, then, in presenting the translations in this volume and contextualising them in a more positive appraisal of people's democracy, I do not intend to provide apologia for Lukács's contradictions and shortcomings. But I do wish to emphasise how urgent the question of popular democracy, its political and cultural preconditions, was in Lukács's works of this period, and how seriously and sincerely he sought to discover answers to this question. Moreover, in so far as Lukács aimed to articulate a long-term, workable concept of people's democracy that would reconcile popular sovereignty, democratic participation, *and* social transformation in the direction of socialism, he could not, I would argue, remain long in harmony with the Hungarian Communist leadership's less principled aspirations after power. Even acknowledging Lukács's vacillations and accommodations, in so far as his conception of the culture of people's democracy was not merely a temporary ideological

masquerade but rather a passionately felt and considered *historical project* of long duration, Lukács was almost destined to fall afoul of a process that was tending towards rapid Sovietisation and the installation of an authoritarian Stalinist régime. Though, in his later life, he tended to represent his anti-Stalinism as projecting back as early as the 1930s – about which commentators as different as David Pike and László Sziklai have expressed justified scepticism<sup>3</sup> – it is not implausible to see Lukács's increasingly acute criticism of Stalinism in the late 1950s and 1960s as having its real roots in the tumultuous five years from 1945 through the conclusion of the so-called 'Lukács debate' in early 1951, when the dangerous attacks on him in the Communist press began to subside.

## II

The image of Lukács's work, especially in the English-speaking world, has been limited by the absence of translations of some of his most significant writing, especially his monumental late work entitled *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* and most of his *Ontology of Social Being*, of which only a small fraction has appeared in English. These works, however, have at least been available in German editions. Of the Hungarian-language texts of Lukács, which comprise about fifteen percent of his essays and many of the occasional writings and lectures that constituted his public activities both before 1920 and after 1945, almost nothing has been translated. These essays present positions that, in one respect, are relatively familiar from other, more canonical critical and philosophical texts by Lukács. In another respect, however, their topical contexts give the Hungarian writings an unusually concrete, public character that helps explicate in new ways some of the more prescriptive, seemingly dogmatic aspects of Lukács's views. More broadly, I would suggest that this translation may counterbalance somewhat the Western-Marxist and New-Left reception of Lukács's work, which strongly emphasised the early work, from *Theory of the Novel* and *History and Class Consciousness*, at the expense of closer attention to the nuances of Lukács's later work, which, after all, represented nearly forty years of continuous engagement and reflection and should not have been swept into a single box of semi-Stalinist dogmatism or theoretical conservatism. There is, arguably, a steady evolution in this later body of work, from his advocacy of an anti-fascist cultural front policy in the 1930s, to a new democratic front following the fall of fascism, to an anti-Stalinist conception of socialist democracy in the global environ-

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3. Pike 1985; Sziklai 1992.

ment of long-term coexistence following the Twentieth Congress in 1956, in which Khrushchev initiated the post-Stalinist thaw. Lukács was, I believe, unduly dismissed as dogmatic and even fundamentally Stalinist by Western Marxists, precisely at the time in which he was suffering serious persecution in Hungary for his oppositional stances. Theodor W. Adorno's review of *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*,<sup>4</sup> completed shortly before the 1956 uprising and published after Lukács's return from secret detention in Romania with other members of the deposed Imre Nagy government, is, for all the delicious venom of its rhetoric and on-target hits about the limited range of Lukács's conception of modernist art, also singularly unfair in its treatment of a more intelligent and supple argument than Adorno is willing even to see, much less engage with any sympathy.

But, aside from filling out and revising our picture of a crucial figure in the canon of Marxist cultural thought, there is also a more substantive, theoretical ground for bringing these essays into the discussion of Lukács's work: they represent Lukács's attempt, in a very significant transitional conjuncture, to articulate the relations of democracy, socialism, and culture, in a new political framework in which broad progressive alliances needed to be developed and maintained. As with the prison-notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, I would suggest, Lukács's post-WWII 'occasional' essays took seriously the task of developing in the Hungarian situation a theory and practice of democratic-socialist cultural hegemony, in which the Communist Party and Communist-organised mass-organisations were to employ educative and persuasive *cultural* means, in alliance with other socially-progressive parties and organisations, to lead the Central-European nations in a post-fascist, popular-democratic direction.

Lukács's writings of these years were already ambiguously, but nonetheless discernibly divergent from Stalinist politics on the Soviet model, a gap that would grow more openly critical in subsequent years. The persecution campaign against Lukács that began in 1949, his participation in public events and eventually in the rebellious break of 1956, his arrest after the Soviet invasion and eventual return from Romania, and his increasingly outspoken critique of Stalinism in the 1960s help us to perceive a consistent undercurrent of thinking about the relations of socialism and democracy in Lukács's thought.

My translation is a first attempt to present in English some of these essays from the key transitional years following the fall of fascism in 1945 up to the imposition of a full-scale Stalinist dictatorship in 1948, which was the date the allied peace-treaty had originally set for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. I want to suggest that Lukács saw this interim-period as a special historical moment in which the East-West Cold-War divide had not yet

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4. Adorno 1991, pp. 216–40.

hardened into a wall, and the slogan of a 'new democracy' was not, despite the tactical manoeuvring of the USSR and the local Communist leadership, simply a ruse towards establishing uncontested Communist domination in Central Europe. Rather, Lukács envisioned a genuinely alternative path of development towards a new democratic order that would be neither that of Western formal democracy nor the so-called 'socialist democracy' that Lukács had seen up close during his exile in the USSR during the 1930s and World War II (which had included his own arrest and interrogation, as well as the internment of his son-in-law in a Gulag). In fact, I would argue, reversing the typical order of priority in Communist politics at the time, rather than viewing the USSR as the achieved socialist model 'ahead' of the people's democracies, Lukács came to understand the putative 'incompleteness' of people's democracy as a potential corrective for the thoroughly achieved deformities of both Marxist theory and practical politics that Stalinism had instituted as relatively stable features of Soviet society even after the death of Stalin. Not only did Lukács come to believe that the post-WWII nations of Central Europe needed to be protected against the abstract, cynical, and violent domination meted out by Stalinist leaders, he eventually suspected that their supposed 'delay' in constructing full-scale Soviet-style socialism had helped maintain a crucial potential necessary for any possible reform in the USSR as well: the not-yet realised theory and practice of socialist democracy rooted in a *democratic-socialist* civil society, in a sphere of popular-democratic mass-participation not subordinated to the socialist state, a space of civic activity that had been violently evacuated during Stalinism and never truly reconstructed.

### III

The translations in this volume include the entire book, *Literature and Democracy*, first published in 1947 and powerfully influential at that moment, along with five other essays from other sources; together, these comprise a representative sample of Lukács's activity as, so to speak, a public intellectual between 1945 and 1948. I use this term of public intellectual to distinguish the more publicistic format of these essays from Lukács's more purely theoretical and critical writings, such as *The Destruction of Reason*, *The Historical Novel*, and *The Young Hegel*, not to mention the major philosophical works following Lukács's forced retreat into relative seclusion in the 1960s, his attempted reconstruction of historical materialism in a new, encompassing Marxist aesthetics and ontology, and his projected but never completed ethics.

In *Literature and Democracy*, Lukács devoted two major essays to his title theme, as well as additional essays on democracy and culture, and on Lenin

and culture. In these essays, he set out a vision of a new democracy that, in his view, could, through intensified involvement of the masses in all aspects of civic and cultural life, overcome the traditional opposition of direct democracy – appropriate to smaller communities such as the Greek *polis* and the Swiss cantons of Rousseau's time – and formal democracy, with its capacity to relate to the greater scale and differentiation of complex modern societies. These essays also reasserted the cultural importance of realism (though more of the nineteenth-century variety than the 'socialist-realist' sort), which allowed the arts to be transformed not by socially-disconnected formal experimentation, but, rather, by reflection of the new concerns, contexts, and social compartments that popular democracy entails. He also includes essays that discuss more specific topical issues pertinent to the Hungarian postwar-situation: the cultural debate, begun in the 1930s but continued after the liberation, between the village-based, nationalist 'populist' writers and the cosmopolitan, modernist 'urbanist' writers of the capital-city; the revision of Hungarian literary history and cultural historiography, the need to eliminate from historical writing the nationalistic, reactionary myths of the counter-revolutionary interwar period; and, perhaps most importantly, in two key-essays, 'Free or Directed Art?' and 'Poetry of the Party', the question of art's freedom in relation to the constraints of politics and political ideologies. In additional essays included here, Lukács considered the role of Marxist philosophy in a people's democracy; discussed principles of selection and judgement of appropriate literature for working-class theatre-events; argued against the burgeoning interest in abstract art and surrealism in postwar Hungary; and considered the role of the Hungarian Communist Party in postwar Hungarian cultural life.

A brief look at the more material side of these publications will provide a sense of their public dimension. During his first few years after his return to Hungary, Lukács was extraordinarily active as a public intellectual figure: constantly lecturing, writing articles for the newspapers, republishing or reworking material that had appeared in the Soviet Union during World War II, conducting debates both national and international, and engaging in the contemporary cultural life of Hungary to a degree almost unprecedented for Lukács. Many of the essays included in this volume originated as occasional lectures. For example, the important essay on 'Poetry of the Party' was a lecture in 1945 for the anniversary of the death of the left-wing poet, Attila József, who committed suicide in 1937; 'Literature and Democracy I' was an address on 20 January 1946 to the political academy of the Hungarian Communist Party, originally published as a pamphlet with comments by the talented, highly respected writers, Milán Füst and József Darvas, and a response



to the comments by Lukács. 'The Unity of Hungarian Literature' was a lecture to the Hungarian writers' congress in the city of Debrecen on 20 June 1946; Lukács appended a note to the published essay, stating 'In so far as problems of great importance arose during the debate, especially in the speeches of Péter Veres and Gyula Illyés, which I reflected upon in detail in my closing remarks the following day, I considered it necessary to work those thoughts as well into my essay.' 'The Tasks of Marxist Philosophy in the New Democracy' was Lukács's 1947 lecture to the Milan Marxist philosophers' group and appeared in pamphlet-form. 'Proletcult and Kitsch' was an instructional lecture, reprinted as a pamphlet, in the party training school for cultural directors. 'The Hungarian Communist Party and Hungarian Culture' was a lecture for the 1948 political academy of the Hungarian Communist Party, while 'The Revision of Hungarian Literary History' was a lecture for the revival of the Hungarian Literary History Society in 1948.

These works, then, represent thoughts responding to public occasions – paedagogical, institutional, and controversial – in a rapidly changing cultural and political environment. The positions that Lukács adopts are based not simply on a set of theoretical principles, but also on an intention to intervene in a concrete context, with the goal of developing a new democratic culture appropriate to the transitional, post-fascist moment. The texts were rapidly produced and provisionally formulated; they were polemics or dialogic interventions in an on-going, pluralistic argument about what this new culture should look like.

The general perspective that Lukács develops throughout these essays connects a republican ethics of the active life with a politics of popular democracy and an aesthetics of realism. This trilogy of mutually constitutive positions is extremely consistent in Lukács from the 1930s onwards, so it is worth expounding the links that connect them. Lukács spells out these connections explicitly in the Foreword to *Literature and Democracy*.

First, he emphasises the ethics of the *vita activa*, which assumes that individual human capacities, both cognitive and practical, are most fully developed by their concrete engagement with the shared, public life of social, political, and cultural activity. Notably, he has far less to say about labour, and this emphasis on civic interaction over production points to the strongly Aristotelian and Hegelian dimension of his Marxist politics, as well as, ultimately, of his Marxist aesthetics. Lukács writes:

To the active person... life becomes comprehensible, and ever more comprehensible the greater the degree of action, and the more intensely life is permeated with human activity. Once again, both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, because only an all-embracing, enduring, collective human activity can produce a truly comprehensible social reality.



Subjectively, because only an acting person can truly recognise reality, penetrating its essence, to its true depths, the more manifold, energetic, and enduring his activity, the deeper.

He immediately links this ethical vision of the *vita activa* as an all-sided enrichment of the person to the aesthetics of realism, which most fully embodies this civically-active ideal in the forms of narrative representation:

To this mode of comportment and life corresponds, in art, realism. Just as in the period of the inward turn no spiritual domain reached, or even approached, the 'deep psychology' that literature offered, the human aspect of the active comportment always attained its acme in great realism. Here, life has taken on a comprehensive and profound clarity, as nowhere else; here, the activity of the active person and social education directed towards the comprehension of action have attained their highest degree.

Great literary realism, he suggests, instantiates the concentrated essence of the active, social comportment of human beings.

The relation of the ethics of the *vita activa* and the aesthetics of *contemporary* realism – including official socialist realism – to the politics of popular democracy is more complex, however, because it involves several dimensions. Ideologically, Lukács situates the present, in which the problem of a new mode of democracy is being posed, as the ideological convergence of three major currents. The first is the existence of the Soviet Union, that is, an achieved socialist country, in his view. What is notable, here, is that Lukács registers the existence of the USSR, which, after all, had Red Army troops and its security-apparatus encamped on Hungarian soil, but he makes almost nothing of the Soviet model of politics in his argument, other than to state that the present situation in Hungary makes it impossible to aspire to, despite its 'exemplary' existence. One might suspect, correctly I believe, that Lukács wishes to say as little as possible about the Soviet model, since his vision of people's democracy diverges significantly, even as he offers surprisingly minimal lip-service to it (his lack of attention to the Soviet Union and socialist-realist literature was one of the central points on which Lukács would soon be attacked). The other two currents are the formal democracy of the West and fascism. Lukács presents an ideological genealogy of crisis in which formal democracy's shortcomings fail to sustain the progressive commitment of broad swathes of intellectuals, who are influenced by increasingly irrationalistic and anti-democratic ideologies. These ideologies function both positively, to attract intellectuals disaffected by democracy to right-wing political movements, as well as negatively, by dispossessing them of active, socially-effective, progressive outlooks and plunging them into subjective inwardness, aestheticism, or ontological pessimism.

Behind Lukács's genealogical hypothesis of 'ideological decay' lies a vast body of work he wrote while in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and war-years, including his polemics against various forms of naturalism and expressionism, his studies of the ideological decay of bourgeois philosophy leading up to Hitlerism, his study of the young Hegel, and many of his major literary-historical writings on the historical novel and nineteenth-century realism. People's democracy, Lukács states outright in the preface of *Literature and Democracy*,

is the search for a way out of this crisis, based on economic, political, and social transformation. People's democracy is the ceaseless skirmishing, not always conscious, against the internal and external powers, the legal and illegal forces, that seek to block its development. At the same time, it is also a struggle to overcome the general crisis and in it the ideological and aesthetic crisis, a struggle against the perpetuation of this larger situation.

In turn, the possibility of writers overcoming the ideological crisis and its expression in the literary currents of naturalism, expressionism, existentialism, and other forms of modernism, in Lukács's view, lies in their ability to engage seriously with the historical project of giving shape to a truly substantive, participatory, popular democracy:

From a literary point of view, it is clear where the standard is here: the crisis of formal democracy, accompanied by the romantic anticapitalism growing out of it...becomes completely transparent. People's democracy will only endure and be able to develop if the continuous, concrete, and genuine participation of the masses in public life is ensured. It will only endure and be able to develop if this participation is not just taken up with day-to-day political matters, but rather if along with these, the working masses are educated to a concrete and genuinely public spirit, public capacity for judgement, and the vivid need for participation in public life.

Lukács's affirmation of realism and polemics against modernistic departures from it are familiar and consistent; however, it is precisely these that have often made him subject to the charge of both aesthetic conservatism and dogmatism. 'Thomas Mann or Franz Kafka?' – as he would pose it in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* in the 1950s: a dogmatic either-or with which writers and readers are confronted in Lukács's more literary-historical and theoretical studies. The occasional nature of these Hungarian essays, in contrast, reveals more of the concrete political and social assumptions that lie behind these apparently dogmatic prescriptions. While one can certainly disagree with Lukács's views of modernism – and, as a modernist scholar, I find them excessively narrow, to say the least – nevertheless, in the Hungarian

essays, one finds a different centre of gravity for Lukács's realist aesthetics than stylistic prescriptions of a matter of taste dressed up as an ideological argument. Rather, what is primarily at issue for Lukács, prior to questions of literary form and style as such, is the social and ethical embedding of the intelligentsia in Hungarian national life after the defeat of fascism. In essence, Lukács is offering a new dialectical view of the transitional relation between a bourgeois order in decline and a socialist order only in its nascent stages. Whereas typically, in previous Marxist politics, the dialectics of bourgeois and socialist society had been seen primarily as a matter of tactics – for instance, in Lenin's complex tactics concerning parliamentary structures or, in the 1920s, the partial re-introduction of markets with the New Economic Policy – Lukács offers a much more original view with significant implications for how his work would be received in the socialist world and, in turn, how he would come to view the Stalinist forms that socialism had taken on historically since the late 1920s.

As a Marxist, of course, Lukács believed in a background-way in the economic determination of social life, and hence assumed that a key-component of the struggle for socialism involved transforming the property-relations of the base. However, with respect to the abolition of private property and the socialisation of the economy, the prospects in postwar Hungary were relatively limited; capitalist-social relations were likely to persist for decades into the future. This – assumedly – slow pace of transformation of the economic base allowed Lukács to bracket the more economic assumptions of the current dialectical materialism and compelled him to shift his emphasis from underlying social-economic factors to ethical issues. For Lukács, the key question became, not: How can large-scale industry be built up rapidly in Hungary so that the economic basis for socialism can be laid in a still largely agrarian country? But, rather: How can the human beings necessary to a new social order come into being in this situation of transition? What sort of social and especially civic order will give shape to a new, publicly motivated, fully participatory mass-citizensry? And what kind of culture can help foster, support, and guide this civic order?

Herein lies another dimension of the ideological crisis Lukács diagnosed. In the ideological crisis of bourgeois society, it is not simply a matter of ideological content that is at issue, but also a crisis of meaning: a crisis in present-day society's ability to motivate action and belief in its name, a capacity it had once possessed in the civic republicanism that it exhibited in revolutionary moments such as the English and French Revolutions, in the Decembrist movement in Russia in the 1830s, and in the struggles for national independence in the United States, Latin America, and Central and Southern Europe

throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Briefly formulated, the pivot of Lukács's theory of transition, of the interactions of bourgeois and socialist societies in the transitional phase, was the degree to which socialist politics could help re-animate this civic-republican activism, which Lukács viewed as the acme of the bourgeois-political legacy, its epic moment, as it were. He sought to recapture in people's democracy the ethically motivating, belief-compelling *vita activa* of the citizen that bourgeois society had, in his view, squandered, leaving its intelligentsia, the direct producers of its ideologies and the cadre of its political and cultural institutions, increasingly unmoored from the public life on which its historical endurance depended.

Literature becomes, for Lukács, the key training ground and educational means for shaping the popular-republican, proto-socialist subjects of the new democracy. Lukács makes this connection explicit, in so far as he projects a new publicness in which debates about literature lie at the centre, and his own intervention in *Literature and Democracy* and the related public lectures and essays is explicitly intended to engage and deepen this public self-clarification:

I publish this collection of articles in the hope that, in them at least, the main lines of the new situation, the perspectives for development, will be thrown in relief. By now, it can already be established that, comparatively speaking, the liveliest debate has taken place on the terrain of literature. To the publication of this book I attach the hope that it will renew and reanimate these debates. Because, in fact, there are still an extraordinary number of questions yet to be clarified even on this terrain of literature, and these can only be brought to a head if the representatives of the most diverse standpoints openly and sharply expound their views.

This emphasis on the public sphere represented the focal point of Lukács's divergence from Stalinism as well, on a number of issues. As the last quote suggests, Lukács believed in the arrival at what he took to be the objective truth of realism through an open confrontation, in the medium of publicness, between competing ideological world-views. Just as, in his literary criticism, he sharply criticised not only his modernist and existentialist opponents but also a socialist realism that schematically presented an already achieved truth, making the narrative merely illustrative, so too he saw vigorous public debate as the means by which truth would be dialectically arrived at and concretised as what Gramsci would call 'hegemony', a complex of explicit and tacit consensus circumscribing the field of ideological conflict and giving ideological development a general, but open-ended direction.

## IV

A crucial moment in which Lukács participated in such debate around the theory and practice of people's democracy was in response to an essay by the outstanding liberal-political theorist and publicist, István Bibó, entitled 'The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy', published in the October 1945 issue of the journal, *Valóság* [Reality].<sup>5</sup> The Communist official responsible for cultural policy, József Révai, wanted to confiscate the issues containing Bibó's article, which criticised aspects of the behaviour of both the political Right and the Communists as endangering Hungary's fragile institution of democracy, arguing that a more solid democratic centre in the governing coalition should be forged between the Social Democrats and the left wing of the smallholders' and peasants' parties. Apparently on Lukács's prompting, Révai allowed the issue to be circulated, with a public debate to ensue.<sup>6</sup> Lukács was one of the major respondents, and, in his response, he characterised Bibó's essay as 'right-wing'. Subsequent historical events would soon reveal the prescience of Bibó's subtle analysis, however, and Lukács's response, by contrast, appears dogmatic and even wilfully obtuse. Yet, although this encounter was hardly Lukács's shining hour, it does serve to reveal some of the salient features and limitations of Lukács's conception of people's democracy, which contrasts point-by-point in a number of ways with that of Bibó, who was more liberal but no less committed to overcoming Hungary's feudal, anti-democratic past than was Lukács.

Bibó's essay is a long, detailed analysis of the situation in Hungary in the autumn of 1945. He expounds a number of topical points, which it would go beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss, but I do wish to highlight a few key elements of Bibó's essay and Lukács's response. First, the overall argument of Bibó's essay rests on the importance of emotional attachments (and repulsions) in aligning the various social elements of a society with its political structures. Specifically, in the context of a postwar national coalition government of construction, Bibó focused on what was leading to polarisation and strain on the unity of the coalition and what would be necessary to create the conditions of confidence to hold the coalition together. As the greatest danger, he identified the role of *fear* in shaping the emotional attachments that were, in turn, giving shape to the political camps in Hungary. This political fear had two main objects, diametrically opposed but mutually

5. Bibó 1986a, pp. 13–79. See also Lukács's reference to this essay and the ensuing debate in 'The Unity of Hungarian Literature', in this volume.

6. Lukács 1986, pp. 81–118.

reinforcing in their effects: the fear of fascist or other reactionary restoration on the part of the far Right, and the fear of proletarian dictatorship on the part of the Communists. Although Bibó argues that the fear of restoration is the more pressing danger than the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship (on this specific point he would prove incorrect), he sees a grave potential for a circular process reinforcing the extremes at the expense of the democratic centre and its institutional basis in the coalition. Fear of a proletarian revolution, he suggests, is driving people who are not essentially reactionary into a defensive alliance with the ideologically more committed right wing; and fear of restoration is driving the Communists, who control the internal security-apparatus, to sweep into the camp of dangerous reactionaries, fascists, and foreign agents an ever-broader, indefinite group of people who would otherwise acquiesce to democracy and social reform but are fearful of proletarian dictatorship. Particularly in so far as some of the specific actions of the Communists appear to involve political retribution or active persecution of their political enemies, the existential fears of those who might be affected are being confirmed, thus accelerating the defensive demand for security.

Lukács's main argument against Bibó, symptomatically, sidesteps the recognisable practical situation Bibó describes in favour of an abstract-methodological critique. This applied critique rests, in turn, on Lukács's polemical and theoretical writings of the 1930s and 40s in Moscow. In these, including his still-unpublished study of German philosophical development, *The Destruction of Reason*, Lukács developed a Marxist *historiography* of superstructures out of his earlier theory of ideology. In *History and Class Consciousness*, in the early 1920s, Lukács had reconceived Marx's conception of ideological 'false consciousness' in terms of the theory of commodity-fetishism and 'reification': capitalism's systematic expression of social dynamics under the guise of a relation between things. Lukács's innovation at this phase of his career was to bring this Marxist conceptual legacy to bear on the specific framework of *disciplinary* knowledge that Marx and Engels had thought of as generally constituting the ideological superstructure; philosophical, literary, legal, psychological, and similar discourses. In such superstructural discourses, Lukács believed, objective social dynamics of reification were expressed as epistemological *deformations* and *deficiencies* in the knowledge of society and its human actors these discourses sought to provide. In the 1930s, Lukács added to this theory the hypothesis that over the span of capitalism's development into its twentieth-century forms, the systematic integrity of these superstructural discourses tended to get undermined, leading to 'ideological decay'.<sup>7</sup> With

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7. See, for example, Lukács 1980b, pp. 114–66.

the development of an internally-contradictory capitalism and the increasing strength of socialist currents, bourgeois ideology had been subjected to a two-fold, ever more intense pressure leading to accelerated degeneration. On the one hand, the deformative force of reification had intensified as capitalism's systemic nature had become more pervasive, penetrated all reaches of life, and become global in its extent (as Lenin's and Luxemburg's theory of imperialism postulated). On the other hand, the existence of an achieved socialist state in the USSR and the growing influence of socialist thought was also, Lukács believed, forcing bourgeois thinkers into a defensive posture: less and less able to grasp within reified conceptual frames the manifestations of a threatened, crisis-ridden capitalist society or the tendencies insistently pointing beyond capitalist society. This is the large-scale conceptual armature that Lukács turned ready-made on Bibó in their debate on Hungarian democracy as well – with, one would have to admit, something of the effect of hunting fleeting rabbits with an artillery-piece.

Bibó, Lukács argues, leans heavily on social psychology in his analysis, which emphasises subjective appearances over 'objective' social and economic realities. This social-psychological subjectivising of social and political thought is, however, in Lukács's view, indebted to the broad tendency of the German 'Geisteswissenschaften': figures such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger and others that Lukács set into a tradition of developing irrationalism. This irrationalism, Lukács believed, had both actively contributed elements to fascist ideology and, as a background discourse, had weakened the resistance of the intelligentsia to fascism's demagogic appeals. Likewise, in so far as Bibó's social-psychological analysis, in cleaving to subjective-spontaneous perceptions as primary social facts, has fetishised appearances at the expense of reality, he too has then put forward views that are 'objectively right-wing', even though he may personally be a sincere democrat.

Lukács's argument, putting it bluntly, is forced and unpersuasive. In his closing remarks to the debate, Bibó openly acknowledges the importance of social psychology for his analysis, but denies that he has hypostatised social psychology into ahistorical-ontological 'types', mythical paradigms, or national characters as was characteristic of the *Geisteswissenschaft*-tradition that Lukács scorned. Moreover, he turns Lukács's pivotal tool of analysis, the contradiction between phenomenal 'superstructural' expressions and underlying social forces, back on him, suggesting that Lukács has one-sidedly failed to grasp the efficacy of 'ideology', the crucial role of social *appearance*. He even elicits Lukács's privileged object of analysis, the ideology of fascism, as a case in which this dissonance between ideological efficacy and actual social forces



became acute to the point of throwing the Marxist paradigm into doubt: 'I am prepared to acknowledge that these real psychological facts are not always strict parallels to the real facts of social class, however, it is not my mistake that it is this way. We likewise must establish that the viewpoint of social class became somewhat confused before the manifestations of fascism and proved insufficient to understanding it.' Fascism, as Bibó discerned, had revealed how *politically* disarmed the Communists had been by the combination of spasmodic, sectarian policies following the Comintern line and their inability to grasp fascism's ideological appeal as anything but a cynical tool of an imperialist monopoly-capitalist class-dictatorship. More broadly, we might say that, in debating Lukács, Bibó would put his finger on a key problem in Marxism: its significant weakness in *political* thought as distinct from *social* analysis, for which it is justifiably celebrated as a major conceptual framework. In 1945, Communists had little in the way of political thought to go on than trying to discern the lessons in Lenin's skilful, but often improvisatory and in any case not consistently democratic-political practice. Notably, after the Prague Spring, at the end of his life, Lukács would return once more to this problem of the *political* deficit in Marxism, arguing in his posthumously published *Democratisation Today and Tomorrow* that Lenin's *State and Revolution* was still limited by nineteenth-century Second-International and anarchist legacies and that Marxism needed to develop more articulate, up-to-date modes of understanding the specificity of the political. Bibó, I would argue, already saw this problem clearly in 1945 and worried about what it entailed for the effective contribution of the Hungarian Communists to a fragile postwar democracy.

At a more basic level, too, Lukács's failure to acknowledge Bibó's social-psychological analysis is symptomatic of his difficulty in translating his literary and cultural views, centred on the reflective value of great realist narrative, into real-life political circumstances. Once, when I was presenting this work of Lukács, in connection to the issue of the *vita activa*, I was asked by a colleague how Lukács conceived of 'action'. After a pause for reflection, I answered: action for Lukács is what happens in a good nineteenth-century novel. This was not just a witticism; I believe it accurately reflects Lukács's mature conception of social action: that it resembles the socially-determined, but contingent, complex, and necessarily fallible activity of characters in realist narrative. This is not to say that conscious intention and even theoretical reflection are not crucial to Lukács's conception of action, but, drawing on the analogy to narrative situations, he does emphasise the *limits* on our ability to have exhaustive, clear knowledge of historical and political situations and, consequently, also stresses the problematic *ethical* decisions of actors under circumstances of epistemic and practical constraint. If ever there



were an artistic form that highlighted the effective divergence of character-knowledge and feeling from objective social necessity, it is the realist novel. The nineteenth-century canon is full of characters whose fears, conceits, wilfulness, blind spots, and desires shape their relation to social objectivity in tragic ways. Yet Lukács, one of the century's most important critics of nineteenth-century realism, nevertheless was not able to see the possible analogues to his own situation: the potential for tragedy that Bibó more clearly discerned in the rising mutual fear among the principals of the democratic coalition.

Two specific points that follow from Bibó's analysis – two among several others discussed at length in his essay – also touch closely upon Lukács's conception of people's democracy. First is the classic 'liberal' question of the 'rules of the game' in a democratic government. In his essays of this period, Lukács consistently advances a long-standing Marxist criticism of 'formal democracy': the potential that formal adherence to institutional structures and rules may be taken as an end in itself, fulfilling the procedural conditions of 'democracy' even at the expense of genuine popular sovereignty and popular-social content. In other words, insistence on formal 'rules of the game', Lukács argues, may become an ideological fetish to conceal the class-inequities in society. People's democracy, in valuing popular participation over formal rules, and encouraging elements of direct democracy even in a large-scale representational system, goes beyond the too-often empty promises of 'merely formal' democracy. He deploys the same argument against Bibó. Yet Bibó's defence of the 'rules of the game' is, contrary to Lukács's insinuation, not fetishising in this way, and indeed, Lukács misses his more substantive point. Bibó clearly acknowledges the need for social mobilisation and transformation in the society at large; he also avows that any number of institutional and procedural arrangements can be credited as fully 'democratic' and that different national and historical contexts call for different ways of realising democracy. On these points, though with a different inflection, Bibó is as much an advocate of a 'new democracy' as was Lukács. His point, however, is a more pragmatic one. For Bibó, the issue is not adherence to a given set of 'fetishised' rules that define democracy in their formal, abstract fulfilment; rather, it is a matter of understanding practically how democratic-political institutions are established and allowed to endure and develop. In a foundational moment, Bibó argues, when democratic ideas and institutions are still weak and shallow, the concrete behaviours and emotional attachment of political actors play a crucial role; relations of confidence and predictability are especially critical. In Hungary in 1945, he thus argues, it is almost less important for guaranteeing democracy what the specific 'rules of the game' are than *that there be such rules*, that they be agreed to and adhered to by all who are

involved, through the coalition, in the governmental process. Various parties, but especially the Communists, whose critique of formal democracy gave theoretical justifications for regular end-runs around the 'rules of the game' when it suited their aims, were acting in ways that undermined the mutual confidence and predictability on which a successful coalition depended. Bibó argued that the coalition, by including all the major parties in ways that were disproportionate to their strict electoral proportions, already recognised the importance of the ideological positions of the parties and their socially-different mass-constituencies. But agreement to govern through the coalition was, he argued, tantamount to agreeing to some restrictions on the Party's actions, to a pragmatic bracketing of some of the Party's freedom of manoeuvre to allow the coalition to work as a governing arrangement.

One might say that, in not acknowledging this very reasonable pragmatic point, Lukács revealed the degree to which his Popular-Front position remained abstract in practice. As had been the case in the 1930s in the anti-fascist fronts, even aside from their need to justify the changing conditions in the Soviet Union and their poisoned relations with the Social-Democratic parties, the Communists had great difficulty working in organisations in which they did not lead or command unanimity. A Popular-Front or Gramscian notion of hegemony, however, means acknowledging that the social differences in a political bloc are, to some extent, irreducible, and making such a socially heterogeneous bloc work practically requires accommodations at the ideological, cultural, and practical-organisational level. With his left-liberal orientation, Bibó was more prepared to understand the practical demands of working in a pluralistic, Popular-Front political environment than was the avowed Popular-Frontist Lukács.

The other specific issue was the situation of the police in the postwar-order. Lukács's responses to Bibó's criticisms are of interest in so far as they reveal Lukács's limited conception of the role of law and the police in a democratic state, as well as his overriding concern – one might even justifiably say, 'fear' – that fascism might be restored in the wake of its military defeat. As political background to this point of debate, it is important to note that the Communist Party had manoeuvred to gain substantial control of the police and the internal security-apparatus, which had close connections with the Soviet occupation-authorities and, indeed, with the Soviet NKVD. Already from early on, the Communists sought to exercise their police-power broadly against an ever-expanding set of internal enemies, foreign agents, and 'reactionaries', a process that intensified to terroristic proportions after the hard dictatorial turn in 1948, but which had been already well established under the democratic coalition. Bibó argued that the Communists' use of the police

to pursue ideological political goals and to exercise coercive power not just against specific war-criminals but also against low-level officials, soldiers, and other putative social enemies was stoking the fear of proletarian dictatorship and lending credence that dictatorship was the Communists' aim and their participation in the democratic coalition only a tactical feint. To correct this, Bibó argued, the Communists should allow broader coalition-representation in the security- and police-apparatus, and should seek to cultivate a professional, 'trade'-ethos in the police, rather than an ideologically motivated mentality. Lukács simply dismissed this concern altogether, conjuring the existence of widespread conspiracies of ex-fascists and internal enemies to justify the broad, politically-motivated exercise of police-power. He argued, in a restatement of Lenin's *State and Revolution*, that the police were always a coercive instrument of one class's dictatorship over another; that the police had, in the past decades, been used as a counter-revolutionary instrument against the popular classes, and now the tables were justly turned. If the police were dispossessed of their political function in favour of a professional 'trade'-ethos, this would amount to a subtle reintroduction of a bourgeois class-dictatorship in which the police would ultimately serve reactionary, oppressive ends. Bibó offered the rejoinder that while this acutely political role of the police might be appropriate in an acute revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, it is not appropriate to, and may even serve to undermine, a pluralistic, democratic order attempting to endure 'normally', outside a state of emergency. Implicitly, in focusing on this key-topic (as the subsequent events in the late 1940s and early 50s in Hungary would show), Bibó also offers a more nuanced understanding of the relative autonomy of law and the defence of legality in a democratic society. Lukács's rather limited *political* theory at this time leaves him little conceptual room between understanding legality as a direct social instrument (a weapon in the hands of one class-dictatorship or another) or as a superstructural, easily fetishised 'appearance' that obscures the real social factors underlying it (the balance of class-forces). Bibó understood that, in key respects, the police represented an 'unpolitical' or even 'anti-political' element of the state; if the centre of the political lies in the realm of argument and debate in the public sphere, the police are oblique to that political process, and have the coercive power even to undercut it. Bibó's argument that the police were actually being used by the Communists for ideological purposes does not contradict his implication that the police have an essentially 'non-political' character, potentially destructive to the political domain; he was, rather, distinguishing between what he conceived as legitimate means of political persuasion and illegitimate ones. Legitimate means, for him, included both institutionalised spaces and

broader social mobilisations, which inevitably involve an element of force; they did not, however, include the exercise of direct coercive force for ideological purposes, except in acute revolutionary moments, which, at the time, all parties agreed was not their present situation.

Lukács, whose political conceptions were thinner and more abstract, was not willing to grant the wisdom of Bibó's argument, which pinpointed one of the most critical factors in undermining the nascent democracy in post-war Hungary. The exchange suggests that Lukács – who, evidence suggests, did sincerely prefer that Communists win adherents through debate, persuasion, and social mobilisation rather than police-coercion and censorship – nevertheless had a major blind spot at this point. Lukács's overwhelming fear that fascism might be restored led him to defend, in this debate and in essays scattered throughout in this volume, an increasingly indefensible range of supposedly preventative police-actions, in the name of guarding against a broadly-painted 'reaction'. Notably, in his later anti-Stalinist pronouncements and criticisms of the Rákosi dictatorship in Hungary, he would echo the language of Khrushchev in the Twentieth Congress, in denouncing Stalin's 'departures from legality' during the 1930s. It was a position he was not yet prepared to adopt during the democratic experiment of 1945–48.

## V

Beginning with a notorious attack by the Communist ideologue, László Rudas, published in the theoretical journal *Társadalmi Szemle* [Social View] in July 1949, the so-called 'Lukács Debate' – really a campaign against Lukács, orchestrated by the highest ranks of the Hungarian Communist Party – was launched.<sup>8</sup> Rudas's essay was in three parts:

- I. Formal, More Formal, and Most Formal, Serious and Not Serious (Joking?) Democracy
- II. Comrade Lukács about Lenin
- III. Marxism and Literature

The article was, to say the least, a blunt instrument intended to pummel Lukács into a submissive pulp; Rudas went so far as to advance the ridicu-

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8. Extensive documentation of the 'Lukács Debate' can be found in Szigeti 1952, as well as in Ambrus 1985. The account that follow draws from these volumes, as well from as János Ambrus's afterword 'Házatérés Reményekkel' [With Hopes of Homecoming] and several other biographical and historical accounts of the debate: Zoltai 1985; Hermann 1985; Urbán 1985, pp. 162–80; Kadarkay 1991.

lous though in context frightening accusation, thoroughly 'supported' by selectively edited quotes from past and recent works, that, for twenty years, Lukács had maligned Lenin! We know the degree to which this attack was written to order, from the letter that Rudas wrote to the CP Chairman, Matyás Rákosi, accompanying a first draft:

Not wanting to keep you waiting and break my promise, enclosed is the first part of my criticism of Lukács. I will complete the second part on the literary questions next week, for I am rather busy and, frankly, these twenty-seven pages exhausted me. The article is sharp. But I live what I write and cannot remain indifferent to the falsification of Marxism.

As I understand it, the criticism is for inner use rather than publication. Hence I have found it unnecessary to put a muzzle on. Let me know in case the article is published what you want to change or add. I am happy to change its tone but not its content. I will send the last chapter next week.

With comradely greetings,

László Rudas

P.S. Please let me know whether I should write the third part. I will only write it if it is to be published, for I do not want to waste my time on such a tiring and unpleasant task. What I have written gives you a clear picture of Lukács.<sup>9</sup>

Lukács's first response to Rudas's critique was the publication of a rather flippantly ironic 'self-criticism' in which he took back almost nothing of his views; he can hardly disguise his open contempt for a low-brow inferior. But Lukács had not yet recognised the gravity of the situation nor how thoroughly his position as a prestigious cultural voice of the Party had changed. What followed, in the next months, was a heavy set of denunciations by dangerous party operatives such as Miklós Gimes, Marton Horváth, and most significantly Lukács's old friend and the powerful Minister of Culture, József Révai, who was an ex-poet, literary scholar, and a man of considerable erudition and culture, along with being an authoritative voice of the hardline Stalinist cultural and ideological line. Révai's article 'Notes on Some Questions of Our Literature', which concluded the 'Lukács Debate', received international notice, and was commented upon by important left intellectuals such as Eric Hobsbawm and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

This campaign against Lukács took place in parallel with the most notorious Hungarian purge-trial of the period, the arrest and execution, with the obligatory torture-confession of spying for the West, of László Rajk, the minister

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9. Rudas to Rákosi, 29 April 1949, quoted from Kadarkay 1991, p. 403, but translation modified based on full Hungarian text of letter quoted by Urbán 1985, p. 162.

of the interior, with whom Lukács had cordial relations and had found 'an extremely likeable person'. Lukács would later describe the execution of Rajk, who was in fact a highly orthodox and loyal Communist, as a 'preventative murder' intended to warn those who might not greet the Stalinist line with sufficient enthusiasm. In interviews given late in his life – which are at least of symptomatic importance if not absolutely reliable as historical sources – Lukács pointed to the Rajk trial as a turning point in his view of the Hungarian Stalinists around Rákosi, about whom he had, until then, harboured illusions concerning their aspirations for the people's democracies:

*Int:* A key issue in the Rudas debate was the accusation that you had misinterpreted the class-character of a people's democracy and disparaged the role of the proletariat in the people's democracy.

*G L:* In my own view...a people's democracy is a form of socialism that grows out of democracy. In the opposing view, the people's democracy is a dictatorship from the outset, and it is moreover that version of Stalinism into which it developed after the Tito affair.

*Int.:* I would like to put a question to you which may be completely undialectical and unhistorical. Looking at it from your present position, do you think it conceivable that the people's democracies might have developed naturally into socialism wholly by virtue of their own internal dynamics if the external political situation had not been so desperate?

*G L:* I think so, yes. But, of course, only if there had been no Stalinism in the Soviet Union. With Stalinist methods, any such development would have been unthinkable because even the slightest deviation from the official line would have been impossible. If we think of Rajk's case, we must not forget that Rajk was an orthodox supporter of Rákosi. It is untrue that he was in the opposition.... The whole [Lukács] debate simply proves that the dictatorship which prevailed in the 1950s was a dictatorship from the very start, and that it is a myth that it was preceded by a democratic phase.... I also learned that if such absolutely orthodox people as Rajk could be executed, it was not possible to imagine any alternative. Such a fate seemed to be in store for anyone whose opinion deviated from the orthodox line.<sup>10</sup>

Lukács requested a sabbatical from his university-post and attempted to withdraw from public life in order to write a Marxist ethics, but the Communist Party was not finished with him. General Secretary Rákosi wrote to his fellow Ernő Gerő, 'I am not particularly enthusiastic. A Marxist ethics is hardly our

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10. Lukács 1983, pp. 114–15.

priority' and insisted that Lukács be forced to more publicly and thoroughly recant his views. This was a moment of supreme danger, and Lukács had enough experience in the Soviet Union during the late 1930s to recognise what the implications might be. Lukács rewrote his self-criticism, this time under the direct editorship of Matyás Rákosi. In a letter of 10 August 1949, written from Dobogókő, a retreat in the Tatra Mountains, Lukács tells Rákosi:

Since I escaped from the spinning mill of Budapest and have time to think calmly about my problems, ever more frequently have come to mind the intellectual themes of the conversations carried out with Comrade Rákosi. In Dobogókő I have often thought through these questions, I intensively debated them with Comrade Ernst Fischer and came to the conclusion that I must radically rework the direction in which I constructed my self-criticism....I am very grateful to Comrade Rákosi for making possible this reworking.<sup>11</sup>

Though he never completely disappeared from public view nationally or internationally – even in Hungary, he continued to publish regularly in the early 1950s and was, for example, a member of the editorial board and featured contributor of the 1952 *Philosophical Yearbook*<sup>12</sup> – his reputation and public presence was significantly diminished. It was only in the months leading up to the 1956 events that Lukács was again able to participate more actively in public life and to be recognised as a major cultural thinker in Hungary, though internationally his fame continued to grow.

The immediate context of this sudden fall from grace was a swerve in Soviet policy towards its satellite-countries in Central Europe and a new relation to the West precipitated by the Yugoslav crisis, Communist defeats in Western Europe, and the stabilisation of the postwar order along Cold-War lines. In this context, the Communist leadership across Eastern Europe made a corrective turn away from the conception of people's democracy as broad popular-front alliances and a policy of peaceful competition with the West, towards the establishment of Communist régimes and a cultural politics oriented towards the Soviet model. Whereas, in the past, Lukács's views were not in direct contradiction with Communist tactical aims and may, in having provided a powerful intellectual legitimisation of Communism's 'democratic' role, even have been a faithful if unintended servant of them, clearly neither his political conception of popular alliance nor a cultural policy of democratic debate was serviceable any longer. What stepped into its place was the necessity of 'cultural revolution', which meant the imposition of socialist realism

11. Urbán 1985, p. 307.

12. Szigeti 1952.

and the Soviet model of cultural life; the principle architect of this policy was József Révai. Notable, then, is the consistency with which this question of cultural direction was linked to the conception of people's democracy. In an issue of the same journal in which Rudas's initial blast appeared, Révai had, a few months earlier, printed a speech that he had given to party-leaders, 'On the Character of Our People's Democracy'.<sup>13</sup> In this article, Révai explicitly stated that there had been confusions about the nature of this system and mistaken views in the Party that it represented a distinct political model. From here on in, it should be clear, Révai says, that 'People's Democracy' is 'a dictatorship of the proletariat'. He states that although it was not yet a dictatorship, by June 1948 with 'the destruction of the right wing of the Socialist Party and establishment of the unified Workers' Party...our development into a dictatorship of the proletariat was crowned and definitively assured'.<sup>14</sup> He goes on to say 'we must liquidate the concept that the working class shares its power with other classes. In this concept, we find remnants of a viewpoint according to which a People's Democracy is some quite specific kind of state which differs from the Soviet's not only in its form, but also in its essence and function.' Révai's speech was echoed by other pieces in the Communist daily *Szabad Nép* [Free People] starting in January 1949, when Matyás Rákosi and Révai himself propagated the new line on people's democracy: 'People's democracy, viewed in its function, is a proletarian dictatorship without a Soviet form' (Rákosi, 'On Some Problems of People's Democracy', 16 January 1949); 'Only [because of the presence of the Red Army in Hungary] could we successfully fight the battle against Hungarian reaction organising under the slogan of bourgeois democracy, cross the Rubicon and arrive at the point where our state became such a people's power as to fulfil the function of proletarian democracy' (Révai, 'On Lenin', 22 January 1949). I believe that Lukács, however, was one of the most articulate holders of the view of people's democracy that Rákosi and Révai were clamouring to liquidate. Thus, by 1949, it was not only the concept but also its bearer that was in danger of finding himself on the wrong side of Stalin's tactical swerves.

## VI

In conclusion, I would like to briefly discuss some potential points of contact between Lukács's essays on the culture of people's democracy and Ernesto Laclau's recent work on populism and 'populist reason'. In his 2005 book

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13. See Révai 1949.

14. Révai 1949, pp. 145–7.



*On Populist Reason* and related essays and debates (most prominently, with Slavoj Žižek),<sup>15</sup> Laclau has offered a provocative re-examination of the question of populism, with the constitution of 'the people' as political agency and cohesive symbol at its centre. Laclau's analysis of populism, I would suggest, may offer a useful theoretical perspective on the divergent conceptions of 'people's democracy' that were advanced in postwar Hungary, from Bibó's left-liberal pragmatism to Lukács's popular-front communitarianism to the authoritarian 'proletarian dictatorship without a Soviet form' advanced by the Stalinist leadership in 1948–9. Each these positions laid claim to express the will, aspirations, interests, and possibilities of 'the people'; each also put forward a different conception of 'democracy', the rule of the people. The term 'the people' (in Hungarian, *nép*, with implications ranging from nation to ethnicity to connection with land and culture) and 'democracy' were ambiguous and hence subject to the sorts of rhetorical conflicts over interpretation that Laclau asserts are definitive of the political logic of populism.

Laclau's notion of populism is complex and richly articulated through a number of theoretical sources, including contemporary rhetorical theory and the language-based psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. Utilising Laclau's work, one might fruitfully consider Lukács's work in closer textual detail, examining the consistent rhetorical operations, derived especially from Hegel and Marx and from realist-literary narrative, by which Lukács posits his conception of an active 'popular' community that will be the loose-fitting subject-object of a new democracy in formation. Here, however, I cannot venture into

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15. Laclau 2005. Žižek responded with 'Against the Populist Temptation', Žižek 2006; a somewhat expanded version of this text appears as 'Why Populism Is (Sometimes) Good Enough in Practice, but Not Good Enough in Theory', in Žižek 2008: pp. 263–333. Laclau answered Žižek's criticisms in 'Why Constructing a People is the Main Task of Radical Politics', Laclau 2006. Cf. Marchart 2005. Notably, a substantial element of the Laclau-Žižek debate centered upon the role of 'reification' and false consciousness of 'real determination' of economic class, just as, sixty years earlier, it had in the Lukács-Bibó debate. Laclau, in his 'Why Constructing a People' response to Žižek, definitively rejects this part of Lukács's theoretical legacy. He suggests that Žižek employs two unexamined assumptions, both of which should be rejected: '(1) any incarnation of the universal in the particular should be conceived as reification; (2) such an incarnation is inherently fascist. To these postulates we will oppose two theses: (1) that the notion of reification is entirely inadequate to understand the kind of incarnation of the universal in the particular that is inherent in the construction of a popular identity; (2) that such an incarnation... is inherent to any kind of hegemonic relation – that is, to the kind of relation inherent to the political as such.' (Laclau 2006, p. 650). He continues, 'Unfortunately for Žižek the kind of articulation between the universal and the particular that my approach to the question of popular identities presupposes is radically incompatible with notions such as reification and ideological distortion. We are not dealing with a false consciousness opposed to a true one – which would be waiting for us as a teleologically programmed destiny – but with the contingent construction of a consciousness tout court.' (p. 651.)

the theoretical intricacies of Laclau's argument, but will only highlight a few major themes in order to sketch out some issues for further reflection and consideration.

In the theoretical section of *On Populist Reason*, Laclau usefully formulates his notion of populism in a set of theses. First, he argues, 'the emergence of "the people" requires the passage – via equivalences – from isolated, heterogeneous demands to a "global" demand which involves the formation of political frontiers and the discursive construction of power as an antagonistic force'.<sup>16</sup> Put in a somewhat more vernacular form, he means that 'the people' appears as a political agent when single particular demands begin to be linked up by their common opposition to some power and the lack of fulfilment of those demands is experienced as a common injury to a single community; latent in the chain of equivalents, unfulfilled demands is 'the people', ready to emerge onto the political scene. Second, however, there is a crucial step of 'nominating' this political agency as 'the people' and investing it with the feeling that a community may come to feel about its own bond of identity: 'Since, however, this passage [from isolated demands to single, 'global' demand] does not follow from a mere analysis of the heterogeneous demands themselves...something qualitatively new has to intervene. This is why "naming" can have [a] retrospective effect. This qualitatively differentiated and irreducible moment is what I have called "radical investment." ...If an entity becomes the object of an investment – as in being in love, or in hatred – the investment belongs necessarily to the order of *affect*'.<sup>17</sup> Finally, because the chain of equivalences between demands entering into the political constitution of 'the people' remains, to some substantial degree, particular and irreducibly heterogeneous – composed of individuals and not a fused, uniform 'community' – the content of the name 'the people' and its political orientation is shifting, contestable, and potentially unstable. Together, these three features – the movement towards linking particular demands as equivalents, the nomination of these linked equivalents by a collective name, and the ambiguity of this name's meaning and reference – constitute the conceptual nodal points of Laclau's theory of populism.

Laclau, who claims the theoretical legacy of Antonio Gramsci but accepts that he is developing a *post*-Marxist political theory, affirmatively embraces the provisional, rhetorical, and ambiguous aspects of political populism, which he sees not only as a key feature of contemporary right-wing politics but also as the most important possibility for conceiving a new, contemporary radical-left politics. Lukács, by contrast, was necessarily more hesitant

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16. Laclau 2005, p. 110.

17. Ibid.

and ambivalent about rendering fully explicit some of the 'populist' implications of his postwar writing. The reasons are easy enough to enumerate. There were practical considerations: the pressure of his role in the Communist Party on the one hand, and the need to differentiate the Communist, proletarian-oriented politics from the peasant-based, nationalist politics of the 'populist [*népi*]' writers and intellectuals, the Hungarian *narodniki*. Yet there are also deep-seated theoretical reasons as well. The sheer indefiniteness of the social-political agency embodied in 'the people' harmonises uneasily with the putative determinateness of class in Marx's thought and Lukács's own neo-Hegelian Marxist framework. For Marxism, class is a virtual but determinate social identity rooted in economic relations of production; the concept of the working class is ultimately a defining feature of capitalist society and its dialectical overcoming in socialism. 'The people' in contrast remains irreducibly indefinite, both in its 'ultimate social determinates' – Laclau's point is that 'the people' has no predetermined or fully-fixable social characteristics – and in its relation to a particular mode of production. The legacy of 'the people' gathers different moments in history – the Greek *polis*, the Roman republic, plebeian uprisings of various moments, the French Revolution, the independence struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the anti-fascist struggle, and forward into 'people's democracy' and 'socialism' – and although Lukács can understand that the historically-uneven development of Hungary demands this hybrid-agency in practice, unlike Laclau, he is not prepared to throw over the Marxist presupposition of the social determinacy of class in a specific mode of production. His practical uncertainty in relation to implementing popular-front ideas and commitments follow from this uncertainty of principle.

There is another space, however, in which Lukács offers genuine insight into the logic of populism as Laclau has attempted to establish it. That, however, is not to be found in his political theory and practice nor in his philosophical writing, but, rather, in his *literary* theory, which forged an intimate connection between the novel (specifically the 'great realist' novel of the nineteenth century) and the political emergence of 'the people'. Novels, he consistently suggests, can be understood as a sort of rhetorical laboratory for constituting and nominating 'the people', exhibiting the conditions under which this succeeds or fails and with what social, political, and existential results. Lukács could see this clearly in relation to the realist novel, which, however, he took to be the exclusive and normative type of novel for which this was the case, in part because his theory of reification and ideological distortion was entwined with his particular version of 'populist reason'. Lukács required not only that the novel model the rhetorical articulation of equivalences between particulars and their summation into a collective narrative of an emerging 'people',

but also that this model meet the demand for 'objective' social knowledge, as opposed to 'false consciousness' under the sway of reification.

Here, however, we must go beyond both Lukács's judgements of taste and his epistemology of reification, in order to embrace Laclau's idea that the heterogeneity and indefiniteness of the people is irreducible, which makes its identity unstable and the conflicts around its definition *inventive*. Not only, then, for the realist novel, but also for a much vaster span of novels this logic of populism, this problem of constituting 'the people', would be at stake. Lukács's focus on the novel, including the realist novel, remains timely, in so far as the logic of populism increasingly defines the political and cultural horizon of our day. What is no longer timely, however, is his exclusive valorisation of realism in the articulation of populist reason. 'Constituting the people', I would argue, is not only the underlying object of the great realist novels of Balzac, Tolstoy, Mann, and Gorky, as Lukács believed; 'the people' – fulfilled in different ways – is also the object of the works of Émile Zola and Theodore Dreiser; James Joyce, John Dos Passos, Virginia Woolf, and Alfred Döblin; Franz Kafka, Gertrude Stein, and Samuel Beckett; Anna Seghers, Stefan Heym, and Peter Weiss; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Milan Kundera, and György Kónrad; Jean-Paul Sartre, Elsa Morante, and Günter Grass; Carlos Fuentes, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and maybe even, at an exasperated stretch, Thomas Pynchon.<sup>18</sup> Of course, a 'people' that could embrace this sweep could only be a people that Lukács would no longer have recognised, and most likely that would not have recognised him as one of their most cogent philosophical representatives.

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18. Cf. Jed Esty's provocative argument that Lukács can be read against the grain; contrary to Lukács's exclusion of modernism from epistemological 'objectivity', modernist texts offer positive epistemological acknowledgement of global difference, revealing the limits of closed, Eurocentric notions of universal progress: Esty 2009.

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## ***Literature and Democracy (1947)***





## Chapter One

### **Foreword to *Literature and Democracy***

This book is a collection of lectures and articles from the years 1945–7. It follows, naturally, that the book cannot offer a systematic and fully developed survey of every problem that emerges concerning the relations between literature and democracy. On the other hand, it was unavoidable that in some of the essays certain repetitions appear. For all this, the author begs the reader's pardon. I am presenting here each article and lecture without revision, so that the reader may see that the author's judgement on these questions today has not been formed from a retrospective standpoint, but, rather, that, from the outset, he adopted these positions on the matter at hand.

I publish this collection of articles in the hope that in them at least the main lines of the new situation, the perspectives for development, will be thrown into relief. By now it can already be established that, comparatively speaking, the liveliest debate has taken place on the terrain of literature. I attach, to the publication of this book, the hope that it will renew and re-animate these debates. Because, in fact, there is still an extraordinary number of questions yet to be clarified even on this terrain of literature, and these can only be brought to a head if the representatives of the most diverse standpoints openly and sharply expound their views. Aesthetically, too, there are many questions demanding clarification, but above all those regarding the relation of literature to the social situation and development.

Until now, the question of realism has occasioned debate more than any other question. We can assert that, in this regard, in the last two years we have made not inconsiderable strides, although, in certain literary circles, the opposition to the aesthetics of realism is still great. But it is not possible here to stray from the tasks at hand to treat in detail the literature of the last two years. Only as an interesting symptom do I allude to István Sőter's new book [*Play and Reality*]<sup>1</sup> in which a talented writer's inner struggle between surrealism and realism clearly appears. The great, inner honesty of his theoretical professions and his sharp formulation of the problematic point will, I believe, help clarify the complex of questions.

Even in Sőter's case, it is clearly manifest how closely related the question of realism is with the transformation of that society which the liberation and struggle for a people's democracy has brought into being. The relation appears yet more evidently in a little article by Gyula Illyés ['The Writer's Joy'], which appeared in *Response* [Válasz]:

About this, one will only be able to write novels, novels finally, genuine novels; not full of transcendent mediations and Proustian time-theory, but, rather, packed with plot, a thirty-volume *roman fleuve* without break, a novelistic river. I live in a Balzacian world...and ultimately I see people. And through them the law that kneads and shapes them. I just have to portray them and at once the artwork is ready: creation. It is a rare and happy time, at least to those who have sight, those who see sharply, even through tears. And, because, in any case, I am a congenital optimist, I rub my hands together with satisfaction. Perhaps, for this reason, so to speak, my pen does not yet fit between my fingers. I feel that I'm only now going to the true writer's school. I prepare myself for work. I feel that the words are taking on meaning and effect. There is something to talk about, and there will be someone to talk to. And above all there is and will be a reason to speak!

The Marxist standpoint in the question of realism is precisely this: that not just merely aesthetic questions are at issue here. If the question were, why

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1. See Sőter 1946. In his title-essay, Sőter (1913–88) took the occasion of the publication of Lukács 1945a to reflect further on the problem of mirroring reality and the relation of 'realism' and 'surrealism' as apparently divided paths for contemporary writing. He complicates the question of whether there is any genuine tradition of Hungarian realism by posing the further question of whether there is, in fact, any Hungarian 'reality' that could be mirrored: social types or a coherent city-existence that could be the basis of an integrated realist narrative. Sőter concludes that, in the present situation, realism and surrealism are not mutually opposed, but complementary attempts to broaden the conception of reality and to strive towards a 'new realism'.

should Marxists, for some purely aesthetic reason, 'prefer' realism to naturalism or surrealism, then we would have to respond to them: that is your own private affair. Indeed, we could even raise the question: why should not a Marxist 'like' surrealism better than realism?

Here, something different is at stake. The crisis of modern realism is part of the European and American ideological crisis that we have lived through in the last half-century, and which we can not really say to have come to an end. This ideological crisis is, however, in its own totality, the reflection cast by the world-crisis of present-day society, a global crisis which the imperialist development of capitalism occasions (two world wars, fascism.)

People's democracy is the search for a way out of this crisis, based on economic, political, and social transformation. People's democracy is the ceaseless skirmishing, not always conscious, against the internal and external powers, the legal and illegal forces, that seek to block its development. At the same time, it is also a struggle to overcome the general crisis and in it the ideological and aesthetic crisis, a struggle against the perpetuation of this larger situation. We know that we should never mechanically force these parallelisms. To discover in every realist-leaning work of art the spirit of people's democracy, and to discern in every opposition to realism an enemy of the people would distort the picture in a stupid and misleading way. But, if we should indeed reject such exaggerations, we should nonetheless not deny that there is still a relation. However, this relation is only this: that the prerequisites of certain tendencies in society and in world-views follow from certain tendencies of objective development; and that these objective developmental tendencies disadvantage other social and ideological tendencies and vice versa. Likewise, in the majority of cases, or, at least in a genuinely notable proportion, we find alongside this objective affinity – and following from it – subjective affinities between artistic styles and tendencies in social development.

Who will deny, for instance, the subjective affinity of surrealism with such a time in which social life was only open to lackeys and villains (bandits, even), a period when, for the individual, there was no perspective on social life, and could be none?

The way out of the ideological crisis can only be found with the help of a full knowledge of the objective development. In general, narrow framings of the question stand in the way of a proper examination. Today, it is already generally recognised that anti-German sentiment is in no way sufficient to anyone's democratic mentality. But precisely what needs to be considered, ultimately, is that eliminating fascist ideology cannot be reduced to Hitler and company. Without Nietzsche and the whole series of well-known bourgeois thinkers following him, there would be no fascist ideology. Hitler and his followers

brought nothing new into being, just demagogically exploited all the reactionary thinkers of the imperialist period. If now we do not aim to understand the *whole* process, if the work of elimination is not directed against the whole of reactionary thought, then without doubt we remain in ideological crisis. We will have no guarantee against some sort of revival of fascist ideology, no guarantee that the intelligentsia will be any more capable of opposing a new onslaught of fascist ideology than they were before. The worldwide fashion of existentialist philosophy is a thought-provoking sign that this guarantee is far from being established. Because, from the point of view of the ideological crisis, it matters little what sort of political position Sartre and his disciples take individually. The essential thing is that Sartrean philosophy is a direct continuation of the philosophy of Heidegger, who played a major role in leaving the German intelligentsia defenceless in the face of fascism.

More than once, and in this book as well, I have argued that one cannot draw mechanical parallels between literature and the general development of ideology, still less with political and social development. But this relation, although between more complicated forms, nevertheless exists; and, in certain regards, nowhere does crisis manifest itself with greater poignancy and potential than in literary development.

Viewed from this perspective, it is an interesting question, extensively discussed in this book, what is the social basis of the crisis of world-views and especially of literature. If we speak of such a worldwide crisis, the following objection emerges: those literary tendencies that most sharply exhibit the crisis achieve their peaks in France, England, and the United States, that is to say, in the model-democracies. How then can we say that this ideological crisis is in close relation to fascism?

We believe that precisely this objection best confirms our position. In several places, we have discussed the relation of the crisis of democracy and fascism. Indeed, it is precisely out of the crisis of 'classical', formal democracy that fascism sprang, both in a positive and negative sense. Positive, in so far as fascism is an imperialist system of power just like the period's other political systems, aiming at conquests, colonies, grabs for spheres of influence, and such like, however much there may be domestic and foreign policy differences between them. The experiences of the last half-century show that, in terms of internal political structure, imperialist monopoly capitalism embraces fascism (or a partial form of fascism) precisely then and to the same extent that it can no longer realise its internal and foreign political goals with the help of the 'rules of the game' implicit in the old democracy. Under these circumstances, however, attempts, at least, are regularly made to establish fascism. The cause of these attempts is the movement of the working masses; their dissatisfaction with the democratic rule of the 'two hundred families' manifests itself

with such power that, in order to maintain this rule (and this is the real class-content of formal democracy), new methods become necessary. To a great extent, the success or failure of these attempts depends on how conscious the working masses are, whether it is possible to exploit in an anti-democratic sense their bitterness towards formal democracy.

Herein is connected the negative moment of the ideological crisis. The leading ideology of the imperialist period since Nietzsche has been opposed to democracy. Indeed, in the sense indicated above: it condemns formal democracy's ever more manifest opposition to the people; it emphasises – often with insightful and just criticism – the main aspects of cultural crisis which stand in the closest relation to capitalist formal democracy, and concludes from these the bankruptcy of not only any democratic politics, but also of any democratically oriented world-view. We have discussed the main lines of this tendency: aristocratism, rejection of the principle of human equality, contempt for the masses, scorn for economic and political or social motives as lowly and base, the cult of irrationalism and myth, emphasis on the worthlessness of life, turning away from the world, inward, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, viewed alone, these ideas express spiritual attitudes that are not necessarily those of the immediate representatives of imperialist capitalism. However, it is precisely these ideas that render both the masses and the intelligentsia in part susceptible to fascist demagoguery, in part helpless against it. We cannot permit ourselves to think that the emergence and dissemination of such world-views result from the 'Machiavellian' or 'demonic' calculations and manoeuvres of imperialist capitalism. (Of course, as it happens, fascism, for example, unscrupulously employs the collected 'achievements' of these world-views.) In and of themselves, however, the world-views have come into being spontaneously. Because this is how a portion of the intelligentsia reacts to formal democracy's social, political, and cultural crisis. It glimpses only immediately, superficially experienced meanings and 'deepens' these into world-views with the help of some psychology, phenomenology, or ontology, namely with the help of just some inward-turning philosophy. And once the new world-view of crisis comes into being, the successive generations may take as ever more self-evident the behaviours that have been canonised by them.

Thus, if we want to evaluate properly the ideological and literary crisis of our present day, not only do we need to look back over a much longer stretch of time than the fascist era, but we also need to consider a much wider

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2. See, for example, the essays from 1943–8 collected in Lukács 1956, which constitute a critical, anti-fascist complement to the positive aspirations of Lukács's postwar Hungarian essays seeking to foster a new people's democracy after fascism.

international horizon than that of Hungarian-German relations. The crisis we are in and from which we are beginning to emerge is the crisis of classical, formal democracy extending over the whole of our public life, from the fact that the United States openly supports the Greek fascists in suppressing their old enemies, the anti-German partisans, to the fact that many see existentialism as the philosophy of democracy.

Romantic anti-capitalism – and growing out of it, the theory of a ‘third way’ – is so dangerous because, on the one hand, the conduct occasioned above all by the cultural crisis in capitalist formal democracy is spontaneously renewed by this development in every period among a notable portion of the intelligentsia. It is triggered precisely by the internal contradictions of formal democracy, and as an immediate reaction to these contradictions, it remains mired in immediacy. On the other hand – and in consequence of being caught in immediacy – precisely this ideology most easily grows into reaction, even fascism. The ‘third way’ in practice always signifies a struggle against the Left, and the most burning hatred of modern capitalism extremely easily becomes an ally of those who want to revise formal democracy to the Right. (Some of the adherents of the ideology of conspiracy, especially those emerging from among the followers of the ‘third way’, are in this respect truly instructive, and those who, even today, cling to the attitude of romantic anticapitalism should keep this in mind.)

All this is not accidental. Formal democracy distinguishes in the sharpest manner the private person from the public person. Its political education very often becomes purely a matter of clichés. (In this regard, that which literature depicts, from Flaubert’s *Homais* to Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt*, is much more than caricature.) This is not just the case for everyday practice, where the entire ‘education’ narrows to ensuring voting in elections. Where the defence of formal democracy rises to the occasion of thought rather than remaining a mere unreflective practice of voting, its accompanying formalism deflects people’s attention from concrete understanding and judgement of concrete public matters of importance. From this point of view, the United States is defending democratic freedom in Greece, while the arrest of Béla Kovács or the position taken by the composers of *Tomorrow* [*A Holnap*] injures the holy principles of democracy. I might refer here to Arthur Koestler, now in fashion world-wide, according to whom the liberal ‘fair play’ reigning throughout the world has been replaced by Bolshevik ‘Machiavellianism’. Translating this formal ‘eternal truth’ into concrete language, this means: tying up Indian freedom-fighters in front of cannons or slaughtering the Communards was ‘fair play’, whereas ‘Machiavellianism’ only appears if the Soviet Union brings traitors to trial. One could enumerate such examples endlessly. Only this is important

and significant: that there are cultivated and well-meaning people who make such a train of thought entirely their own, so powerful is the influence of the old democracy's formal 'education'.

Once again, it is understandable if romantic anticapitalism develops as an immediate reaction to all this. But just because it is understandable does not mean it is any less dangerous; indeed, it becomes all the more so. Because all the family-traits that the anti-popular aspect of formal democracy shares with reaction cannot efface a fundamental difference: that every open form of reaction (not to speak of fascism) is a qualitatively measurable degradation and social regression; that during the period in which formal democracy came into being it was an important social development compared to feudalism; that, against modern reaction, every advocate of progress has the duty to defend even the most formal, the most crisis-ridden old type of democracy. The great danger of romantic anticapitalism is that its subjectively understandable, often well-meaning, yet objectively right-wing and historically regressive criticism (even if professing to strive towards socialism) stands in the way of a left-wing, future-oriented criticism of formal democracy. For this reason it is destructive, and it deepens the crisis rather than offering a way out of it.

From a literary point of view, it is clear where the standard is here: the crisis of formal democracy, accompanied by the romantic anticapitalism growing out of it (not to speak of reaction itself, of partial and out-and-out fascism), drives the writer's disposition inward; and here is the point where the relation of realism to the development of people's democracy – with which our book deals in many places – becomes completely transparent. People's democracy will only endure and be able to develop if the continuous, concrete, and genuine participation of the masses in public life is ensured. It will only endure and be able to develop if this participation is not just taken up with day-to-day political matters, but, rather, if along with these, the working masses are educated to a concrete and genuinely public spirit, public capacity for judgement, and the vivid need for participation in public life.

With this, however, the whole attitude of the people towards life changes radically. Up until now, they have withdrawn from life, because as it stood before them, it appeared incomprehensible. And it becomes still more incomprehensible as a result of this withdrawal, this inward turn, both in its subjective idea and its objective reality. Objectively, because the large industrial and great political creators of this incomprehensibility of life can, to a great extent, thank this withdrawal for the undisturbed realisation of their aspirations. Subjectively, because an external world viewed purely from within must necessarily become incomprehensible through the distortion of social reality. To the active person, however, life becomes comprehensible, and ever

more comprehensible, the greater the degree of action and the more intensely life is permeated with human activity. Once again, both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, because only an all-embracing, enduring, collective human activity can produce a truly comprehensible social reality. Subjectively, because only an acting person can truly recognise reality, penetrating its essence, to its true depths; the more manifold, energetic, and enduring the activity, the deeper.

To this mode of comportment and life corresponds, in art, realism. Just as, in the period of the inward turn, no spiritual domain reached or even approached the 'deep psychology' that literature offered, the human aspect of the active comportment has always attained its own acme in great realist literature. Here, life has taken on a comprehensive and profound clarity, as nowhere else; here, the activity of the person and his social education towards an understanding of action have attained their highest degree.

All this, of course, refers exclusively to a realism that is oriented towards the essence of reality. Naturalistic snapshots of the surface of the external world are, in this regard, meaningless. In fact, viewed from a certain wider historical perspective, these latter are often mere complements to the inward-turning arts of the imperialist era. It is not by chance that very often such two apparently opposed tendencies appear in parallel; it is not even so rare to find them in the same works of the same author. Nor is it by chance that naturalism is fully compatible with the ideology of the incomprehensibility of the external world. (Equating realism and naturalism, condemning realism on the often well-founded basis of the criticism of naturalism, in many ways parallels the general imperialist tendency to draw, from often very just criticisms of formal democracy, the most extreme reactionary conclusions. Of course, even this parallelism becomes false if applied in a strained, mechanical fashion.)

If both here and in other places we speak of the relation of artistic realism and people's democracy, it is not because we intend to give literary advice or prescriptions, or to lay down stylistic demands. Rather, we are concerned with how human conduct is changing in social life, after the objective essence of society has, at its roots, been modified. Naturally, the change of human conduct does not take place all at once, in one blow. Precisely for this reason it is no contradiction if we connect sharp, determined formulations of matters of principle with practical patience, and we relate the slowly transpiring, often enough crisis-like transformation of individuals with tolerant criticism. All the more so, because the transformation of reality itself is only beginning. Yet on the one hand, the authentic comportment of the writer could prescribe to us how human development should advance. On the other hand, for every writer there remains the danger – and perhaps it will transpire sooner than



they think – that the real development of society, the newly emerging behaviours and the new world-views appropriate to them and the new demands on the arts will throw aside as obsolete and outdated the decadent, inward-turning arts.

This foreword was written in April 1947. Today I still see no need to change anything in it.

György Lukács, Budapest, August 1948

## Chapter Two

### **Democracy and Culture**

Few questions are debated today with so much passion as this one. And, yet, in few questions do the disputants stand so far from posing the question properly as they do, here. For the key to the situation should be sought precisely in the fact that a new democratic culture is taking shape Europe-wide, without the material social basis, the system of capitalist production, at present being changed. Every discussion that would like to approach the essence of the question must take this fundamental fact as its point of departure. As long as there are still no subjective and objective preconditions of socialism, one may only theoretically, or, at best, propagandistically oppose socialist culture to that of capitalism. Yet such an opposition does not lead to the decisive questions of the new democratic culture. The new democracy, as we shall see, may represent a significant shift in the culture that capitalism brought into being and allowed; but, as long as the capitalist mode of production remains, it is a harmful utopia to speak of a socialist culture, because it cripples practice and it obscures and disturbs the self-consciousness of the masses.

Properly recognising the essence, achievements, and limits of capitalist culture is a question of great importance and practical significance. For the contradictions of capitalism have been manifesting themselves for a long time, especially on the terrain of culture, and the analysis of these contradictions has played a major role in nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural criticism. In this cultural

criticism, however, the outstanding fact is how often it ascribes the contradictions, shortcomings, and limits of capitalist culture to democracy. This tendency already appeared with Thomas Carlyle<sup>1</sup> and reached its pinnacle with Friedrich Nietzsche,<sup>2</sup> with Oswald Spengler,<sup>3</sup> and in fascism; in recent decades, this train of thought played a major role in Hungary as well, ranging from cultural philosophy to crude demagoguery. (Today, for example, it is a widespread reactionary fashion to hold democracy responsible for every economic problem occasioned by the counter-revolutionary period and Hungary's participation in the War.) Thus, if we want to deal seriously with this question, before all else we have to clarify the framework within which the new democratic culture can move.

## I

The character of every culture is determined by the social division of labour that constitutes its basis. In this regard, capitalism has further developed, cast into a new mould, and hardened the bases of the social division of labour in the older class-society: the separation of city and village, mental and manual labour. In capitalism, these oppositions are sharper than ever. The reason for this is not only technical development and the accompanying differentiation and specialisation, but also, rather precisely, the most progressive aspect of the capitalist system of production. Namely, that this social system poses the question of equality and freedom, albeit only abstractly. In this respect, the capitalist system of production stands in opposition to the old societies, in which among the people pertaining to the different classes, among the different callings that occupy various positions in the social division of labour (lord and servant, landed gentry, urban craftsman, and serf) not even the thought of their equality emerged. Thus, even where certain of the objective economic relations remained the same, the relation of the social totality to them was new. The notably dynamic character of capitalist development still further sharpens these oppositions; the individual strata continuously

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1. Lukács considered Carlyle's romantic anticapitalism and his elevation of historic great men for hero-worship a precursor of mythicising aspects of fascist ideology.

2. Nietzsche, as one of the key influences on modernist culture as well as a crucial source for a wide range of ideologies of the Right, was the object of a number of detailed critiques by Lukács, most notably in his book *The Destruction of Reason*, Lukács 1980a, where he characterised Nietzsche as 'founder of the irrationalism in the imperialist period' and argued that Nietzsche offered the bourgeoisie new ideological tools for affirming the basic social and ethical implications of imperialist capitalism.

3. Spengler's highly popular civilisational history *The Decline of the West*, Spengler 1926, was, for Lukács, both a symptom of and further influence on the interwar cultural pessimism that prepared the ground for fascism.

change and individuals continuously migrate from one stratum to another. In opposition to the old societies, where tradition sanctifies inequality and lack of freedom, capitalist development in essence shatters tradition.

The contradictoriness of capitalism reveals itself most clearly precisely in the division of labour itself. Here, the ever greater development of the forces of production calls forth ever new human capacities, yet, at the same time, the capitalist machine, factory, office, and so on make the people employed there a cog in a machine, the mutilated slaves of their specialisations. Engels rightly points out how the latter aspect of the capitalist division of labour is so general that even those who do not directly participate in production bear its stamp.

Another manifestation of this same opposition is that the objective social interdependence of people and production, as well as the social characteristics based on this interdependence, have never before attained such a degree; yet, the very same social division of labour calls into being an unprecedented isolation of the individual's self-consciousness. If the individual feels himself to be like an 'atom' in the capitalist system of production, in its content this idea is nonetheless false and baseless; yet its psychological genesis necessarily follows from the structure of the capitalist system of production. The objective social relations between people remain hidden. The 'atomic' self-conception does not manifest itself only in orgies of unbridled and irresponsible selfishness, but rather precisely in the cultivated parts of society, as loneliness, being left to fend for oneself, being thrown back on one's own resources.

These contradictions are definitive not only of the fundamental developmental traits of capitalist culture, but also of the standpoints taken by people towards that culture, which again faithfully mirror these basic contradictions. On one side, we find such conceptions that not only accept this development unconditionally but also even praise it in all its shortcomings; from the outset, they consider this culture as superior to the old one. This conception, idealising the shortcomings and limits of capitalist culture, teaches a fatalistic resignation. On the other side, at the opposed extreme, stands romantic cultural criticism. With sharp sight, this recognises the faults and shortcomings of capitalistic development, opposing them to the great achievements of the old cultures. Its danger is that it would like to turn back the economically unavoidable current and thus it flows without delay into reactionary utopianism. (Among us, László Németh's 'socialism of quality'<sup>4</sup> is the clearest example of such a tendency.)

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4. Németh was an erratic, brilliant, and highly prolific intellectual associated with the 'populist' literary tendency in interwar Hungary, which allied with the peasantry and rural village-culture against the decadence of the big cities. Lukács singled out Németh for particularly stringent and repeated criticism at this time, in part because

## II

Behind every such conception lurks a crudely mechanical connection of economic base and culture. Crudely mechanical conceptions always lead to fatalism. In contrast, as soon as we acknowledge the contradictory aspect of development, it calls to our attention the fact that every result originates in contradictory tendencies. It can thus never be a mechanical, fated product of that development; the reciprocal interplay of contradictory forces under different conditions may affect the outcome in quite different ways. This viewpoint is really important to grasping the problem of democracy. Taken in themselves, the equality and freedom that the production and circulation of goods brought into being already contain certain seeds of democracy. Equally, however, the economic and cultural monopolies developing here call forth opposed tendencies. These opponents have waged war in Europe around democracy since the French Revolution. Indeed, not only in the sense that reactionary powers have pushed back democracy, but also that developments in democracy itself have exposed the limits of purely formal democracy. The famous witticism of Anatole France that the law forbids with equal fervour both rich and poor from sleeping under bridges casts in a sharp light these limits of democracy.

With this, we arrive at one of the central questions of culture. The capitalist system of production, in principle, offers everyone free access to culture; capitalism abstractly denies that within a single nation there could be two or more different cultures. The great representatives of new developments always appeal to 'everyone', in contrast to noble culture, where this was an exception or an indirect, not intended outcome. Yet the *material* bases of capitalist culture are such that the overwhelming majority are presently in no situation – and really cannot arrive at one – in which they could have a productive relation to cultural values; and they are especially not in a position to generate such values.

This circumstance follows from the social division of labour in capitalism. Not only the separation of city from village and mental from manual labour lend the former entities predominance in the terrain of culture; the division of labour also proceeds in such a direction that ever fewer people have access

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he wanted to influence the more left-wing, plebeian element of the populist intellectuals to ally with Communists and Socialists in constructing a popular-front people's democracy. In Lukács's view, Németh, in books such as *The Revolution of Quality*, Németh 1940a, which argued against Marxism in favour of a special, racially tinged Hungarian path to a utopian small-producers' socialism, had led populist radicalism astray, rendering it vulnerable to cultural pessimism, irrationalism, anti-Semitism, and acquiescence to fascist politics.

to the totality of culture – including those mental workers who generate culture. On the one hand, the specialisation produced by the capitalist division of labour dismembers whole persons into mutilated piece-workers on one or two issues; on the other hand, it disperses the totality of culture, rendering invisible its relations. Great universal questions, the fundamental questions of spiritual culture are pushed ever more into the background: the decline of philosophy, the marginalising of questions of world-view in the arts, the neglect of questions of the social totality all follow from it. The slaves of the division of labour are physically not in a position to immerse themselves in these problems, while that small stratum who would have this possibility, precisely because they mainly come from among those who do not labour, do not and cannot have any vivid feeling for comprehensive cultural problems.

It is no wonder that, under these conditions, the greatest creators of culture are ever more solitary in capitalist society. Objectively speaking, every comprehensive problem remains and affects them, but, in the everyday life of capitalism, these become generally less visible. We have already emphasised that the general tendency in this society is towards an atomised self-consciousness of individuals. Cultural activity taking its point of departure in this self-consciousness generates two equally false extreme poles: the 'ivory-tower' and kitsch, which necessarily appear in tandem; the former on a high level and the latter on a low level together expose the disappearance or at least the obscuring of fundamental problems of society and world-view. Both receive their affinity from the atomised persons of capitalism. Kitsch is the commercial exploitation of the broad masses' severance from true culture, and the factories that produce capitalism's cultural goods (the press, theatre, movies, and so on) draw convenient and cheap profit from the preservation and extension of cultural backwardness. On this basis, the second false extreme of capitalist culture comes into being, false aristocratism, the 'ivory-tower'. Its relative justification derives from the deserved scorn for the dominant kitsch of the period and for those who create it. Yet, in so far as its representatives see only the symptoms and not the motive forces, in so far as they seek only to rescue form from drowning in kitsch and do not protect the great human content from capitalist mutilation and deformation, their struggle necessarily remains constricted to a narrow circle and mostly unproductive for culture.

These two false extremes, as human types, correspond to the complementary duality of opportunism and eccentricity. On the one side is the complete lack of any capacity to resist the destructive tendencies of society towards culture, on the other side a stubborn retreat and withdrawal into oneself. The result on both sides is defencelessness. And, precisely among the more cultivated and talented, the greatest insularity comes into being upon this basis, which should really stiffen resistance. The defencelessness of the most

talented and praiseworthy ideologists of capitalist society is one of the most important lessons of the fascist period. We see how such crude demagoguery was able to win over a segment of the talented, and, above all, how little the overwhelming part of the intelligentsia was able seriously to defend itself from the poisonous effects of fascist reaction, even in that period in which externally it was still possible to do so.

### III

In order to progress in our reflections, here, we must return to the material-social bases of culture. The material base of every culture is human free time. The cultural basis of the old class-societies was that the ruling class did not perform any productive labour and thus commanded almost unlimited free time. In contrast, the capitalist division of labour creates a new situation, and it forces the ruling class to integrate into its own framework. From this situation, romantic cultural criticism's longing for the past takes its point of departure, its mourning of vanished great cultures. This latent reactionary tendency was brought most clearly to light by Nietzsche, when he declared that slavery was the foundation of every culture, in so far as it gave the ruling class enough free time, and when he urged, accordingly, the introduction of a new form of slavery as the only means of putting a halt to cultural decline.

It is on this point, perhaps, that the significance of the workers' movement for the solution of the cultural crisis of present-day society appears most clearly. According to Marx, the quantity of wages and labour-time – within certain limits – is always an object and result of struggle. Accordingly, Marx welcomed in his day the introduction of the ten-hour workday as a significant historical turning point. Yet, if we recognise the general cultural nature of the question, then we can no longer find it accidental that in protecting its own rights, the working class became the leading, directing force of social renewal. And, indeed, not just in the immediate sense, in so far as the workers' movement influenced, through the organisation of intellectuals, the wages and labour-time of intellectuals also. Here, it is, above all, a matter of providing a social model, and making an exemplar for the whole society, even where the means of the workers' movement cannot be immediately and mechanically applied. The basis of the free time of the working peasant is the distribution of land.<sup>5</sup> This is most pressingly the case where, as in Hungary, the remnants of feudalism remained under capitalism. The fundamentally different social

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5. The pace, extent, and economic costs of land-reform were critical concerns in Hungary after World War II, because of the semi-feudal relations that persisted in the countryside and the deep poverty of the rural populace.

situation of the working peasantry from the working class feeds illusions such as seeing its liberation as an autonomous, separate path, independent of the struggles of the working class, perhaps even coming into being at the expense of the workers. Among us, such damaging illusions have been numerous, and the healthy development of more than one talented person has been arrested by them. They have done so despite the fact that the collected experience of the development that began with the French Revolution shows that only in league with the most advanced, most revolutionary urban strata can the village-labourers attain the economic bases of their cultural lives. The socially exemplary role of the workers' movement manifests itself precisely in this leadership, in this whole directive activity, in the recognition that it can achieve its own liberation only by breaking every chain.

But the exemplary role of the workers' movement extends further. One only has to cast a glance at how the method of working-class struggle relates to culture in order to see this. The workers' movement signifies the shattering of the illusion of the atomistic individual; it brings solidarity, togetherness, universality theoretically and practically to the fore. It makes conscious the social relations of associated people, relations that consciously influence the practical life of the individual and his whole world-view. In this way, the workers' movement reveals a way out of the contradictions of capitalist culture. If we consider, from this point of view, the ideologically disintegrative process sketched above, we see that the private person is separated from society, indeed is opposed to it. Again, we are not just thinking of the most common case, of unchecked individual selfishness. Precisely the most excellent of today's society, the most talented and morally refined, feel deep disgust at the hypocrisy of normal capitalist public life, from which they flee into pure individuality and privacy. This is one of the general illnesses of modern bourgeois culture. The severance of artists and scientists from the great questions of society has brought about the separation of art and science from life. With this, the development of ideology mutilates the human totality even beyond that damage already wrought by the material division of labour.

From the outset, the workers' movement, already in its spontaneous phase when it was only about the struggles for wages and labour-time, pointed the way out of this dilemma, all the more so when it consciously struggled on the terrain of politics and culture. The workers' movement takes up this question anew: is it possible for an individual to be complete, to be intellectually and morally cultivated, without economic and political culture? And it gives a determined, bold answer where the fashionable agnosticism of bourgeois thought abandons every genuine great question to open evasion. It is no wonder that, from Émile Zola and Anatole France to Romain Rolland and Roger



Martin du Gard, the most advanced writers in later capitalism, who took the crisis of culture seriously, could see a way out of the contradictions of the present-day culture and gain a new perspective on them only to the extent they approached the thought-world of the workers' movement.

#### IV

At the pinnacle of the old type of democracy, Maximilien Robespierre prohibited the organisation of the workers. This act of the great revolutionary typically characterises the early illusions of the old democracy about the social effects of formal equality and freedom, if liberation from the bonds of feudalism were to come into being. Since then, this conception, which, with the political economy of Adam Smith, received its deepest and most comprehensive economic foundation, already long ago collapsed beneath the weight of social facts; its cultural untenability in particular has become daily ever more evident. Of course, the insufficiency of merely formal democracy – albeit not on the terrain of culture narrowly understood – was already manifest in the time of the great French Revolution. Precisely the genuinely revolutionary democrats, the truly popular revolutionaries Jean-Paul Marat and Robespierre transgressed the bounds of formal democracy and saved the democratic revolution by never granting any freedom of expression to the counter-revolution, even going so far as executing its representatives.

But a far-reaching abolition of formal democracy, in order to validate the true content of democracy and its essential form, only became a pressing international and daily question in the imperialist age during the struggle against the imperialist reaction, fascism. More and more, we became conscious that equality and freedom, however partial, however approximate, nevertheless also necessarily imply sporadically breaking with formal democracy in order to attain their true realisation; and they entail such state and social institutions as might impel a social system founded on inequality of wealth and income and economic dependency towards true equality and freedom. Thus – in sharp opposition to Robespierre – this means precisely drawing the large organisations that gather together the working people (trade-unions, worker- and peasant-collectives) into directing the economy, politics, and culture.

Here is the central question of the new democracy: a society of working people consciously seeks to solve the question of how the acquisition of cultural and progress in cultural life can be made accessible for *everyone*. As a goal, this means creating such economic conditions that would provide everyone, at least to a minimum degree, the free time, intellectual challenge,

and material basis that is necessary to culture. Again, if we speak of free time, it is not exclusively to be understood in terms of the length of the workday. (This is not so much a guild-like matter that the workers, in difficult times, in the interest of saving democracy, would not be obliged and capable of making great sacrifices in this domain.) It is also part of every social and state initiative to improve the economic situation of the peasantry who have been granted land. The peasant, groaning under usurious taxes for his little plot and toiling with primitive implements, still does not even have the preconditions for the free time necessary to cultural life. The task of the country-wide peasants' cooperatives that have come into being with state support is to establish the basis of these preconditions. Whoever hopes to lead the broad peasant-masses to culture without these preconditions only feeds illusions. Among us, years ago the people's academies were such an illusion. Only a few, among them for example József Darvas, recognised the true situation, seeing that the eternally raked-up example of the Danish people's academies had a social precondition: eliminating the remnants of feudalism among us was then still a task to be carried out.

This is a question of principle, not just a matter of partial tactics. The first, tentative steps of people's democracy surpass the darkest reaction. In the coming into being of reaction, in the conquest of the broad masses with base slogans, in the intellectual defencelessness of a notable part of the intelligentsia in the face of fascist demagoguery, the contradictions and limitations of the old, formal democracy played a significant role. From this, one must draw lessons in several different directions: one must go beyond the old type of democracy, but, once and for all, one must also defend its achievements against reactionary attacks. And, along with this, one cannot delay in the complete elimination of the anti-democratic spirit brought into being by fascism.

From this perspective, every concrete question offers a complex picture, although a genuinely democratic solution is theoretically not difficult. Let us take, for example, the question of professional qualification. Originally, it was a weapon of absolutism, later of bourgeois society against the feudalistic style of occupying a post. Yet, shortly, it brought into existence a bureaucracy separated from the people, which (particularly in Prussia and Hungary) preserved many feudal remnants. These tendencies early on created the pseudo-qualification, especially among Hungarian lawyers. Today, everyone feels the necessity of radical reform on this terrain; at the same time, reaction defends itself tooth and nail, holding up the shield of 'expertise', pseudo-qualification. Only the popularly-based, democratic *content* of social life may indicate a way out. From this content it is evident in how many cases the life experience evolved mostly in workers' and peasants' organisation is superior

to bureaucratic routine, which, today especially, is very often full of counter-revolutionary sentiment and often flows over into counter-revolution. It is not a matter of contempt for expertise, but, rather, of recognising its limits in *deciding* political and social, economic and cultural questions (where expertise is only a preparatory means to decision). It is, furthermore, necessary to expose how often formal qualification conceals a lack of genuine expertise, and how it may be gained elsewhere than through specialised schooling; of course, full acquisition of expertise without specialised schooling is always an exception. Thus we need to open the social pathway to everyone, so that they may complete and systematise the valuable but incomplete knowledge that they acquired through experience and self-education.

This example signifies a matter of principle. It manifests itself most sharply in the state-apparatus, but it refers to every branch of culture. In recent decades, the so-called question of *élites* has dominated bourgeois sociology. Even in the posing of the question, there are strongly reactionary elements: dividing the formation of the stratum of leadership from the development of popular life. The consciously-reactionary conception, from Nietzsche to fascist demagoguery, goes so far as to oppose the *élite's* selection to popular life; from this derives the fashionable, skewed criticism of democracy, which is represented as if it were organically incapable of forming a suitable leadership-stratum. And the intellectual defencelessness of the liberal ideologues against the offensive of reaction and fascism reveals itself in so far as they too see the true cause of the crisis of modern culture in the 'massification [*Vermassung*]' of culture. For example, Karl Mannheim represents this conception, not seeing that precisely the masses and the mass-organisations can play an active role in leading out of the cultural crisis, giving new, democratic content to the individual's feeling of life and world-conception as well. Such an ideological weakness of the left-wing intellectual, his fearful panic before the mobilisation of the broad masses, gave rise in recent decades to that skewed situation in which many thinkers, otherwise in no way reactionary, judging from the perspective of the selection of *élites*, found the old social organisations permeated by feudal remnants superior to those of democracy. This conception was particularly widespread in Hungary and Germany. Even the lessons of two world wars and their preparation, the diplomatic and military superiority of democratic states over reactionary ones, have not been able to provoke any serious revision of this view.

Of course, there are serious social reasons for such deep-seated prejudices. The most important of these is the growing insight that even the most perfectly developed capitalist free competition, purged of any feudal remnants, is not capable of offering truly free competition for the selection of genuine

talents, in so far as this 'free competition' ceaselessly produces ever new situations of monopoly for the rich and blocks those great talents who originate in poor circumstances from arriving at their proper place. From a correct feeling for the state of things, however, far-reaching false consequences are drawn: a positive view of the old system's ways of selecting people. Yet, precisely there where the remnants of feudalism persisted under the capitalist system of production – especially in Germany and Hungary – this backward principle of selection becomes all the stronger. (Long-term service without pay, for example, by private docents at the university, state-officials, and similar, directly excludes taking in those great talents originating among the common people.)

For this reason, it is a mistake to talk about any cultural programme in isolation, as a purely cultural programme. The material protection of the workers and peasants (peasants' collectives, the provision of inexpensive farm-tools to the new landowners) is an *integral part* of every realistic cultural programme. But the concrete connection is still closer: the very first task is to lead the broadest masses into culture, the general raising of the quality of fundamental education (it is not an accident that, worldwide, there is the closest relation between anti-democratic systems and illiteracy). Of course, the cultural programme of the new democracy goes far beyond this. No one will deny that, already, there had been certain possibilities for educational advancement – generally in cases and to the extent that it favoured the interests of the capitalist system of production (worker and machine), and where the leading edge of the working people won a small measure of it for themselves. In the great majority of instances, however, one can only speak of individual and problematic advances, while, in many cases, intellectuals originating in the working class or peasantry exhibit those false extremes of capitalist culture, opportunism and eccentricity.

In the new democracy, the struggle for culture is also carried out *from above*. This means, above all, broadening mandatory popular education to the widest circles and establishing truly general foundations for education (unified, mandatory, general schools). Secondly, this means guaranteeing institutionally that a broad talented portion of the working youth coming from poor circumstances (not just exceptional talents or bright sparks) can participate in higher education without having to exhaust its energies. Thirdly, it means the institutional possibility that talented adults can systematically complement the experiences they have gained from practical life and the knowledge gained through self-education. Finally, it means the extension and popularisation of cultural values to everyone. This final item has already for a long time played a role as social work, and in the new democracy as well it will be to a great extent the domain of the activity of social organisations (worker- and

peasant-organisations). What is new in this is that social activity is no longer opposed to the activity of the state, as of old: indeed, it should even receive the far-reaching support of the state.

## V

We need institutions, but, here, it is so much more than a mere matter of creating new institutions. We need a new content for our whole activity, so that there might be a culture of working people, of workers and peasants. The more sharply we emphasise this new content, the more sharply at the same time we must take a position against narrow, sectarian, guild-like conceptions of worker- and peasant-culture. Gorky emphasised in one of his speeches not only that every truly great culture originates in the people, but also that its content is folkloristic as well; it is no accident, however, that among Gorky's examples number precisely Prometheus and Faust. For us, in Hungary, the renewal of cultural contents that have grown out of popular life lies particularly close at hand. The true pinnacles of our culture (Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady, Béla Bartók) likewise originate in popular life. Yet it is characteristic of the development up to this point that precisely these figures of the greatest significance have had to struggle against the wildest opposition, so that afterwards with the help of the crudest falsification and brutal mutilation they could be fit into 'traditional' culture. The change in the new democracies essentially consists in this: what up to now has been the breakthrough of isolated individual geniuses, their own individual affair, now must become the consciously fostered, fundamental good of the whole culture. One must, from this point of view, re-evaluate the whole past and reform the existing cultural education (programmes in scientific policy, artistic education, and such like). This does not mean, as reactionaries assert, breaking with national traditions; on the contrary, it is the re-animation of a truly national, popular tradition and the creation of a new national tradition, even where the great names of the cultural legacy stay in place (Petőfi).

The new tradition connects organically into the popular traditions, in the still fresh reality of peasant-culture and in the productive tendencies of workers' culture. Yet these are not slavishly carried over but further developed through conscious criticism: that which, in peasant-culture, is narrowly provincial or, in workers' culture, merely guild-like and sectarian is stripped away. Genuine recognition of popular culture itself far surpasses these limits. It breaks apart the unjustified and damaging interconnection of national feeling and chauvinism encouraged by the gentry. Petőfi was thus inseparably and simultaneously the poet of Hungarian popular life and of world-freedom; Bartók and

Zoltán Kodály's collections of folksongs, precisely because they went down to the popular roots, discovered the fraternal interweaving of the cultures of different peoples. Such a profound conception of folk-content raises them above such narrow provincialism, into which they sink so often because of reactionary isolation. It will become clear that such contents are indeed appropriate for poetic expression of the most elevated, comprehensive, and profound sort. Not long ago, Martin Andersen Nexö reminded us that three masterpieces of modern Danish-Norwegian literature were rooted in the same folktale: Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*,<sup>6</sup> Henrik Pontoppidan's *Hans im Glück*,<sup>7</sup> and Nexö's own powerful novel of the workers' movement. In Hungarian literature, Petőfi and the young János Arany exhibit similar inspiration. Reaction buried these seeds beneath itself. The task of the new democracy is to bring them to life anew.

At this point, those greats of new Hungarian culture (Endre Ady, Attila József),<sup>8</sup> until now solitary figures, converge with the best traditions of workers' culture. The point of contact is the deep recognition that the truly whole person is also the public person, the recognition that there is no problem of personal, individual life that is not also interwoven with public life. Only thus, against the caricature of personality in aesthetic individualism, can the truly total and whole person come into being. The Renaissance established the idea of the universal person, which bourgeois decadence abandoned or distorted, and which only single, isolated pioneers advocated in recent times; the legacy of this idea are the best, most productive tendencies of the workers' cultural movement.

Without any utopianism, we can say that the new democracy is facing enormous prospects. On the basis of the Hungarian people's political and economic rebirth stands a new, rich, comprehensive, popular culture. For this, however, is needed a realistic, firm-handed, illusionless, democratic general politics, not just on the cultural terrain narrowly conceived, but also in politics and in economics as well. Cultural politics, in order to become productive, must get rid of any utopianism. One can develop socialist culture behind the back of capitalism precisely as little as one can develop a democratic culture behind the back of a reactionary régime. This was, in the previous decade, the fundamental cultural political error of a notable part of the 'populist' tendency. Secondly, it is an especially dangerous utopia to believe that any

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6. Ibsen's verse-play *Peer Gynt* appeared in 1867.

7. Pontoppidan's novel *Hans im Glück* (or 'Lucky Peter' as it is called in the original Danish) was written between 1898 and 1904.

8. See, also in this volume, Lukács's essay 'Poetry of the Party' for more extensive discussion of József.

kind of effective cultural programme can come into being without ceaseless struggle against reaction. The privilege of education will not be surrendered without struggle any more than will political or economic privilege. Every radical cultural programme that fails to make such connections is either self-deception or fooling the yokels. Thus we cannot recoil from struggle but still less can we be frightened by the masses beginning to mobilise for the struggle. One of the main obstacles to the further development of democratic culture within the intelligentsia was doubt about the 'readiness' of the masses, the alarmed recoil from the 'immature' masses. From that, as from the concept of culture based on isolation, developed an alienation of the working popular masses and the progressive intelligentsia from one another; to overcome this with reciprocal good will and reciprocal and, as needed, sharp criticism is one of the most important tasks of the new democracy. And, here, that prejudice must be overcome, and accordingly, it necessarily becomes the calling of every educated member of the intelligentsia, both as it once with the greatest difficulty weathered the dark time of reaction and as it is today, to be the educators of the working class and peasantry. Reciprocal teaching and learning, democratic interaction, indeed union, are needed. Yet one can only learn democracy in a democracy, just like, as Hegel said, one has to go in the water to learn to swim. The struggle of the masses against reaction, for democratic political, economic, and cultural institutions, the state and social construction of institutions, the reciprocal influence of state and social organs in the work of construction: this is the best school in which to deepen democracy into a world-view, for the creation and realisation of the cultural programme of the new, popular democracy.

January 1946

## Chapter Three

### Lenin and the Questions of Culture

#### I

In his memoirs of Lenin, Maxim Gorky characterised the average petty-bourgeois's dominant sentiment in life with these words: 'Don't disturb me from living the way I'm used to'. Lenin, in contrast, Gorky writes, was precisely that person who most forcefully compelled his fellows to live otherwise than they had hitherto been accustomed.<sup>1</sup> This energy on Lenin's part for radically transforming human life was one of the most important sources of that burning enthusiasm and passionate hatred that his activity evoked. Millions upon millions of workers and peasants lived through decisive turns in their own lives in so far as Lenin's teaching and activity cleared from their lives those obstacles that had, until then, made it difficult or impossible for them to live according to their own desires, demands, and capacities. Equally, many petty-bourgeois, who were internally crippled by the distorting effects of capitalist life, hated the man who drained the economic, cultural, and moral swamps of Czarist Russia, in which they had, until the revolution, been able to croak unperturbed.

In this way, Gorky's remarks throw a sharp light on one of the most important features of Lenin's influence. Gorky likewise correctly emphasises that such influence characterised the life-work of a

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1. Gorky 2004.



number of truly great men. This generalisation offers the occasion to illuminate more concretely the particular, individual aspects of Lenin's personality and activity. The great transformers of human culture were, in previous days, in most cases idealistic evangelists and humanists; let us take for example Savonarola, Rousseau, Robespierre, or Tolstoy. For them, the shaping of human life began 'from above': the reform of the soul, morals, and inner life would be the lever of conversion, helping to turn completely inside out and transform the external conditions of humanity. Lenin's method was the diametric opposite.

This opposition already manifests itself at the level of style. The overwhelming number of idealist evangelists expressed their sayings with powerful oratorical or poetic pathos, seeking with the flames of rhetoric to ignite souls to struggle for the new life. Lenin's style is the rejection of all rhetoric. His style takes as its point of departure an unyielding hatred of phraseology. In Lenin's whole powerful life's work, there is not a single sentence that, in the ordinary sense, would even display pathos; only his entire life's work itself, as a totality, has a sweeping, gripping pathos.<sup>2</sup> This phraseology-free style never expressed so-called elevated contents; in Lenin, elevated expressions always stand in ironic quotation-marks, even if, indeed especially if – written in capital-letters – it was a matter of revolution and pathetically emphatic radicalism. The better part of Lenin's life-work was composed of prosaic recommendations, initiatives, and institutions, along with their theoretical and practical justifications.

The organic unity of this form and content indicates Lenin's individual character, his historical position, the depth of his social research and his view of society. The foundation of Lenin's activity was the humanism of materialist philosophy. The most typical representative and greatest figure of this humanism was Lenin.

The relation of this new humanism to the old will not be immediately clear to everyone. Let us thus pursue the question a bit. In terms of their world-views, Dostoyevsky was perhaps the most typical idealist opposite of Lenin. If, however, we look at the life-work delineated by this idealistic evangelist in its totality, then everywhere we see spring up a really interesting moral problem that was also for Dostoyevsky of decisive significance: the problem of the 'sudden act of heroism'. In brief, the problem is as follows: the most profound moral content of people's being flares up in them, awakening in them

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2. This sentence was one of the key pieces of 'evidence' in László Rudás's 1949 article attacking *Literature and Democracy* and initiating the 'Lukács debate', holding that Lukács had maligned Lenin. See my editor's introduction for more detail on this party-orchestrated 'debate'.

enthusiasm, including enthusiasm for action. However, despite its expression of the essence of their being, their spiritual life's most authentic and unique content, this enthusiasm still does not suffice to raise the rest of their life to a higher level. After the 'sudden act of heroism' they sink back into the objective and subjective falsity of their old life, back down to its baser level.<sup>3</sup>

What lies behind this Dostoyevskian manner of posing the moral question? Without doubt, whether Dostoyevsky knew it or not, it expresses the self-critical scepticism of the idealistic thinker, the evangelistic poet, concerning the effectiveness of idealism in life, even in a life abstracted to pure morality. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* we find a superb, richly poetic depiction of this 'sudden act of heroism'. Karenin wants to separate from his wife; he hates her seducer. The shadow of death in Anna's seemingly fatal spell of illness occasions such a 'sudden act of heroism' from him, and the pathos of Christian forgiveness that radiates from him captivates Anna and Vronsky also. Nevertheless, no new life comes from this apparently radical spiritual transformation. Karenin remains a dry, self-centred bureaucrat; Anna, a woman of the world blindly in love; Vronsky, a lightweight aristocratic officer. In a short time, the social power of real life pulls all three of them down to the level of their earlier existence. For the same reason, in Gorky's early novels, which nevertheless depicted a completely different social strata – outcasts

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3. Lukács here returns to a problem that occupied him already on the very brink of his turn towards communism following World War I. In December 1918, very shortly before he declared himself on the side of the communist revolution in Hungary, Lukács published an article entitled 'Bolshevism as a Moral Problem', in which he expressed his doubts about the moral justification of Bolshevik uses of dictatorial means and revolutionary terror. His concerns echoed those of Rosa Luxemburg, but significantly, his essay ends by posing Dostoyevsky against Lenin. At that moment, unlike in 1946, this confrontation would come out in Dostoyevsky's (moral) favour: 'According to keen-sighted, but here, perhaps, superficial observers, vacillations of faith in socialism are responsible for so many old, tested socialisms not wanting to take up the Bolshevik point of view. I confess that I do not think so. Because I do not believe that more faith is required for the Bolshevik's decisive "sudden act of heroism" than for the struggle for the undertaking of democracy, which is slow, apparently unheroic, yet full of responsibilities, mentally exhausting, prolonged, and instructive. In the former case, one protects – come what may – the apparent purity of one's immediate convictions, while in the latter, one consciously sacrifices – sacrificing oneself – the demand to realise the *whole of social democracy*, and not just a part of it, not just a stray fragment of its centre. I repeat: Bolshevism is based on the metaphysical presupposition that good can come of evil, that it is possible, as Razumikhin says in *Crime and Punishment*, to turn falsehoods into truth. The author of these lines cannot share this belief, and thus he sees an insoluble moral dilemma at the roots of the Bolshevik position, while democracy – in accordance with its faith – only requires superhuman renunciation and self-sacrifice from those who consciously and sincerely strive for it. But even if, perhaps, this demands superhuman strength, it is not essentially an insoluble question like the moral problem of Bolshevism'. – Lukács 1987, p. 41; translation mine.

from society, barefooted men – we read about those who are knights a short time only.

We see here that Dostoyevsky, like every great writer, reaches for a typical case. But the typicality of the problem exhibits itself beyond the merely individual moral circumstances. The seemingly fatal fluctuation of upsurge and fall or slip back into prose is also characteristic of the history of society until now. The psychological question sketched by the great Russian writers often presented itself as the social-psychological fate of great social upheavals as well. Let us think only of the heroic period of the great French Revolution in 1793, which in so little time, hardly a year, was followed by Thermidor.

This social-psychological generalisation derives from the structure of class-society and particularly from that of the capitalist social system. It derives from the fact that such societies not only politically oppress the people, not only economically exploit them, but also that this structure of oppression and exploitation is deeply responsible for morally oppressing the single individual too. This fact has truly important consequences for the social activity of both the individual and the masses.

The great writers of the previous century clearly saw this problem as well. Balzac once observed with great wit that the society of his time could be divided into two groups: either cashiers or embezzlers. That is to say: either honest idiots or clever scoundrels. For someone to be a normally upright person under such conditions – in the majority of cases – would require him to be a moral genius.

And, here, a question surfaces for any person capable of thinking and taking into account social facts: is it right that this is how things are? Can one and should one resign oneself to this state of affairs?

If we pose the question on the level of the philosophy of culture, we arrive at Lenin's fundamental posing of the question. Here, we should understand what scientific socialism, the historical-materialist method and its concrete responses to historically concrete problems, mean for the questions of culture. Summarising briefly, this is the Leninist response: the material basis of life must be changed so that man himself can be truly enduringly, definitively changed, so that his moral upsurges – both the individual and the social ones – will not drown in Karenin-like tragicomedy.

Lenin thought through this problem in a remarkably manifold and profound way. When he spoke of the full realisation of socialism, the 'withering away' of the state and thus the cessation of every burdensome institutional compulsion on people, he sharply emphasised the fundamental significance of 'habit'. Lenin thought that if at last people could live whole generations among more humanly fitting conditions; if, from their social, economic, political,

and so on life, those conditions that led to moral deformation in class societies would disappear; if, in this way, people would become 'accustomed' to a life appropriate to men, then all those elements and tendencies of humanity's moral culture, which were helped along by a thousand years of evolutionary struggle and were individual pinnacles of achievement, would rise to the surface and become the effective motive forces of everyday-life. In no way, thus, does Lenin set himself against the high points that humanity has achieved in moral culture, as some of the vulgar simplifiers would often claim; he does not preach some radical new morality, that would break completely with the accomplishments of humanity already achieved. On the contrary, he views these accomplishments as an important and great legacy. His divergence from the previous great moralists is, rather, in pointing out a new way to realise these values generally and effectively for the whole of society. This new way is the radical transformation of the material structure of society, the institutional elimination of oppression, exploitation, and class-division.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Lukács would see in the Leninist notion of 'habituation', derived especially from *State and Revolution*, the very anthropological core of socialist transformation. At the same time, he came to see Lenin's own development of the notion as historically limited, thus insufficient for solving the unprecedented social, economic, and political problems of advanced socialism. Thus, in his late, anti-Stalinist work *Demokratisierung Heute und Morgen* (English translation: *The Process of Democratization*), written in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Lukács would argue that Lenin's notion of habituation 'was not concerned with the linkage between objective and subjective forces...decisive for the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism especially in its advanced stages. So his concept of Soviet democracy...did not pass beyond the historical constraints in which he lived and, most importantly, the prevailing attitudes within the Bolshevik Party'. Cf. Lukács 1991, p. 145. At the same time, he also argued for returning to Lenin's principle in connection with new problems such as the solving of the problem of consumption in socialist economies, the activation of democratic mass-organisations, and the democratisation of the Communist Party. Lukács viewed the problem of socialist habituation in connection with a multi-dimensional democratisation-process, involving at once the expansion of the 'arena of political decision', the 'restructuring of the external world of everyday life', and the constitution of a human 'social being' that would act in accordance with the 'dignity of species being' (p. 163). In this regard, he was attempting to answer, from out of his own struggles and experiences in existing social situations, the political problem that the anti-communist Ernest Gellner identified as a pervasive weakness of socialist societies, their lack of an idiom for articulating social differences and a conceptual and institutional repertory for mediating those differences politically: 'societies living "under the banner of Marxism" are simply deprived of any idiom in which even to discuss their political predicament. If power relations, as distinct from class relations, are irrelevant or will disappear, there is no need, indeed there is no warrant, for codifying their proper and legitimate limits and deployment. If, on the other hand, politics are in fact indispensable under any form of human organization, and if the human species-essence possesses none of the miraculous capacities for fulfilment in harmonious, or at least non-antagonistic work, with which Marx credited it, then we are in trouble. The same is true if ethnicity is indispensable. Marx-

## II

This viewpoint determined Lenin's critique of present-day culture, including within this culture, formal democracy as well. Compared to Lenin, no one struggled more for the liberation of humanity, for the establishment of equality. But he never remained content with the mere proclamation of equality, or even its legal codification. He always asked whether there existed in the everyday reality of social life, for the majority of the working people, the *actual* possibility as well to live with the freedom or equality that was granted legally. Because if this does not exist, then the legal declaration of freedom and equality is just hypocrisy. Freedom of the press is hypocrisy if the laws regulating the press, the economic relations, and so on are such that in order to live with press freedom one would have to be in possession of an amount of capital that would never be at the disposal of the workers' and peasants' alliances. The freedom of assembly is hypocrisy if there are such social and economic relations that workers and peasants can never manage to get appropriate places and the necessary free time to be able really to utilise their freedom of assembly.

For Lenin, this sharp criticism of the forms in which the formal democracy of capitalist society presented itself was the manifestation of the world-historical opposition of capitalism and socialism. But, if we analyse a great work of dialectical thought such as Lenin's, it would be the greatest mistake were we to stay with rigid generalisations. In Lenin's view, socialism is not just a radically different, radically new stage of development of society's economic structure, opposed to the capitalist system of production, but, rather, in keeping with this opposition, socialism is the most developed democracy as well. This latter viewpoint in turn makes it possible to use Lenin's criticism

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ist societies do in fact discuss the 'national question', but they are very constrained ideologically in what they can say about it. As for the political form of communist society, they cannot really discuss it at all'. Cf. Gellner 1989, p. 121. Lukács's insistence on the importance of democratisation as a key complement of socialist *social* transformation, which remains a steady undercurrent from his emphasis on 'people's democracy' in the 1940s to his call for democratisation in the 1960s, in a certain sense implicitly recognises the justness of Gellner's diagnosis of the paucity of a genuine *politics* in socialist theory and practice. Gellner, however, holds that ethnicity and nation-identification are 'indispensable' anthropological stabilities that generate social power and social conflict, thus necessitating 'politics'. The later Lukács, in contrast, retains the notion of species-being for a through-going anthropological reconstruction of Marxism, in which a thicker, more genuine conception of socialist democracy and the gradual transformation of the social field of differences can be viewed as two reciprocal 'moments' of a historical process that may be of quite long duration. The point, for Lukács, was to diagnosis the abstract, one-sidedness of the actual evolution of Soviet-style socialism and to find ways to set in motion, through a work of democratic reform, the concrete forward movement of this dialectic.

of formal democracy for the improvement of the new people's democracy, for the concrete solution of the problems of that democracy. Although the character of the capitalist system of production has not been abolished, people's democracy nevertheless adopts as its goal that in this society the working intelligentsia, the workers, and peasants should not merely come legally into possession of freedom or equality, but, rather, once and for all, receive institutional guarantees that they may truly live in this freedom and equality in the important questions of their everyday existence. Precisely from this need to realise these guarantees derive the most important, *concrete* daily tasks of the new, people's democracy. And, in the clarification of these questions, each of Lenin's critical observations and constructive works could play a major role. Of course, our learning from Lenin will only have consequences if we ourselves pose the question concretely, that is, if out of his criticism of merely formal democracy and through the experience of the most developed socialist democracy, we adopt that which can be harmonised with the economic bases of the future new people's democracy, that which in their frameworks can truly be realised. And only if we are equally able, amidst these concrete conditions, to orient ourselves towards the democratic maximum of that which is genuinely realisable.

Let us return to the main directives of Lenin's critique of culture and cultural politics. Lenin's materialist viewpoint is above all a demand for the total liberation of humanity. That is, this demand for freedom reaches down into the *physical* being of man, all the way into the creation of the economic and social conditions that institutionally bring total freedom into existence and guarantee it. The reason why socialism can be the highest stage of democratic development, the most perfect form of democracy, is that total liberation traverses the whole of the most important terrain of human life, the terrain of economic life and work. The reason is that every form of exploitation of man by man, whether direct or indirect, reaches an end here.

Lenin's viewpoint, moreover, means a demand for the complete liberation of humanity. Lenin did not stop at the questions of politics, but rather, went into the whole set of questions concerning the everyday life of the people. We do not have time here to discuss this completeness, even sketchily. Only briefly can we call attention to the question of national liberation, that axiom of Marxism, that any nation that oppresses another people can never itself be free, the application of which everyone can see in the fraternal co-existence of the many peoples of the Soviet Union, in that practical victory of the cultural politics of Lenin and Stalin. We can only briefly note that Lenin did not acknowledge socialist democracy as freedom and equality, so long as in reality (and not simply in decrees) the double exploitation of women, inherited

from class society, had not been eliminated, as long as those institutions had not yet been created that would guarantee women's genuine equality with men.

It is an old Marxist tradition of evaluating culture, which Lenin took up and further developed in both theory and practice, that the foundation of every culture is the free time of the people; and thus that the characteristics of a given culture are determined by which stratum in a given society has free time and under what conditions. When Marx spoke of socialism as the 'realm of freedom', he consistently added that this had as its unavoidable precondition the reduction of socially-necessary labour-time.

This relation between free time and culture is so evident that it could not evade the attention of serious bourgeois thinkers either. Yet, here, where there seems to be a convergence in this fundamental establishment of facts, it becomes evident how unbridgeable is the opposition between Marxism and the reactionary philosophy of the modern age. Nietzsche numbers among those thinkers who clearly recognised the relation between free time and culture. But what conclusions did he draw from this? He asserted that a slave-society guaranteed better than capitalism, the unconditional right of the ruling class to an almost unfettered conduct of life without labour. Thus – through occasionally a witty cultural critic of capitalism – he came up with this demand: bring back a social system in which the ancient slaveholder's conditions of life would be guaranteed to the new ruling élite. One hardly has to say that this conception means, in consequence, a demand for the eternal servitude of the working people.

All this, naturally, is compatible with the 'loftiest' idealism of the present day. Compatible, namely, with that idealism that deeply despises Marxism, because of the decisive role that the latter ascribes to the transformation of economic existence. But, precisely against these 'high-minded' idealists, the truth of materialist humanism must be most sharply emphasised. Only that Marxist demand from Lenin, to create the free time of workers and peasants by abolishing the economic foundations of exploitation, truly signifies a new epoch in the cultural development of humanity. Because here and only here is the door open to *everyone* to participate actually and actively in the development, construction, and appropriation of culture, as a creator or receiver.

The fundamental idea of theories such as Nietzsche's is contempt for the masses. It would be a mistake to look for this anti-democratic, anti-mass tendency only among reactionary-bourgeois thinkers. When the bourgeoisie ceased to be a revolutionary class, when it no longer aimed, through the onslaught of its activity, at breaking down the remnants of absolutism and feudalism, but, rather, concentrated on defending its own privileged position from the rise of the masses, the anti-mass tendency came into being among



the ideologues of liberalism as well. It is not possible here, even sketchily, to consider these thinkers. But we allude briefly to the fact that, in recent decades, even among so-called left-wing bourgeois thinkers, this conception has sprung up more and more often, as if the crises of present-day culture were caused by the active participation of the masses in the life of the nation ('*Vermassung*': massification, such liberal philosophers and sociologists say).<sup>5</sup>

Lenin viewed the role of the masses in the present and future culture without illusions. In relation to the present-day level of the masses, he was anything but uncritically praising. Yet, behind every concrete criticism lived in him the deep, vigorous conviction that there is no normal person who is not capable of finding a productive relation to culture. In Lenin's view, however, the possibility of culture starts where the *real* foundations are laid down for everyone to have access to culture and to be able to make culture their own. From this comes the initially extensive character of socialist-cultural politics: one must first create those social and economic foundations, those – often primitive – cultural preconditions, which will open up those doors between the working masses and culture that until now have been closed. Therefore, after the declaration of the Soviet Republic, Lenin never announced distant, utopian objectives. He concentrated forces on the most simple, most ready-to-hand tasks, so that, step-by-step, he could lead the great masses of backward, feudally-oppressed Russia on the path to clear socialist consciousness. The institutional means used by Lenin – state- and social actions for the elimination of illiteracy, middle and high school for talented workers and peasants, and so on – signified so much more than simple institutions of public education. These were the first steps towards the liberation of the people of the Soviet Union from hidden, popular forces that had repressed, misdirected, and deformed them for millennia.

This liberating work, socialist popular education, 'cultural revolution', as the process came to be called in the Soviet Union, embraced a much broader and more general terrain in the life of the Soviet Union than would fit in the framework of even the most broadly understood programme of public education. Here, much more is at issue. We have already spoken of the deforming influences of capitalist society on persons and personal morals. In the person of today, these – briefly summarised – become manifest, on the one hand, as unbridled egoism, on the other, as narrowly restricted specialisation; and, in

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5. Lukács has in mind thinkers such as sociologist Karl Mannheim, philosopher Ortega y Gasset, and the economist Wilhelm Röpke, each of whom deployed the concept of the 'mass' and 'mass-society' in their work of the 1930s.



both of these, as the disappearance of general, social views from individual life and its efforts at success.

Now, if the Leninist, socialist, cultural revolution exerts a transformative, popular, educative influence, this 'educative' work thus permeates every manifestation of life, from the elementary schools to the worker's bench and the consumer-collectives [*kolkhoz*], from the universities to the scientific institutes, from the kitchens to the recreational areas. It plays the most decisive role in the new organisations of production, where the foremost concern of Lenin and his great successor Stalin was to find those organisational forms in all production and all distribution of goods that would increasingly re-educate that pathological egoism trained into the personality by class-society and replace it with appropriate socialist forms of self-realisation. From the system of compensation in the consumer-collectives all the way to socialist competition, the whole series of state- and social institutions stand in the service of this cultural revolution. Everywhere, as a fundamental principle, one detects the anti-utopian characteristic of Lenin's politics. Thus, it is not a matter of wanting to wipe out either egoism or specialisation through socialist measures, nor of endeavouring to place people in the service of socialist ideals through either mere propaganda or education in a narrow sense. The central issue governing this matter is, rather, that the dynamics of social and economic life – regulated by socialist planning – educate the people to the true social essence and, with that, to authentic personality.

Lenin's cultural strategy, which, in all these institutions, took concrete shape, in its main line is directed at socialism's decisive goals, that it might overcome the harmful legacy of the social division of labour of class-society through decades of planned and persistent work. This cultural strategy thus has three great goals: to abolish the difference between village and city, to abolish the difference between physical and intellectual labour, and to restore the meaningfulness and autonomous nature of labour. Here, too, economic construction and cultural revolution appear inseparable. The electrification of the village, the mechanisation of agricultural production, and such like, directly serve purely economic goals: increased production. However, this increase is not achievable by means other than continuously raising the cultural level of the village; so, too, it requires that agricultural production draw ever closer to the principles of planned factory-production, to principles supported by the latest achievements of science, which master nature ever more thoroughly, and which demand of the labour-force scientific capabilities. This process and the transformation that accompanies it in industrial production – which, on the one hand, brings familiarity with natural science and technology ever deeper into the broadest strata of the workers, and, on the other hand, awakens

in each a sense of social responsibility regarding his or her own work, making clear to each person in each sector individually how his or her own work connects to the total social plan – in turn points in the direction of the abolition of every difference between physical and intellectual labour, so that people might, rather, seek and find the meaning of their lives in their labour.

The ultimate theoretical and human foundation of this large-scale cultural strategy reaches far into the past. Marxism has here only rendered fully conscious and applicable in practice the old, great democratic demand: the demand for a many-sided, harmoniously developed, fully capable person. In Marxist theory, and in the practice of Lenin and Stalin, this new ‘only’ is that they have discovered the way to bring into reality the political, economic, social, and pedagogical preconditions of this human development.

On the one hand, Lenin’s cultural politics thus fulfils that for which the best of humanity had hoped throughout millennia. On the other hand, however, he creates a conception of culture, theoretically and practically, that stands in sharp opposition to the bourgeois conception of culture that is popular today. For decades, a conception of culture has been widely shared by the Western intelligentsia, a conception in which culture and civilisation apparently are at war with one another. One cannot say – if we look at imperialist capitalism only – that this conception is wholly unfounded. This opposition, indeed, exists when civilisation, technology, modern production, even the achievements of modern science turn into instruments of war for the darkest barbarism, for the most relentless and dangerous rejection of culture. These facts, which, in the fascist conduct of war and in the fascist factories of death, reached a previously unprecedented climax, make understandable the stance of opposition to civilisation on the part of those fearful for the fate of culture.

Yet the fact that it is comprehensible does not make it objectively well-founded. The objectively correct posing of the question begins when one does not stop with the description of the dynamic of present-day civilisation, inflating this dynamic into an ‘eternally valid’ opposition of culture and civilisation, but rather asks with historical concreteness: how and in whose hands do the powers of civilisation become opposed to culture? But this way of posing the question is already the Marxist one. And the response says that the working people’s actual control over the forces of production is the only sure means of dissolving the opposition, of re-uniting culture and civilisation anew, in a mutually supportive relation. This is brought into being to the highest degree by socialism, as the most developed form of democracy. This can be realised to a certain extent even by a truly mature form of the new people’s democracy, if it successfully breaks with the formalism of the old democracy and institutionally guarantees the working people’s genuine control, not just in the narrowly conceived political domain.

This is the reason the Leninist conception of culture no longer recognises the bourgeois opposition of culture and civilisation. In its theory and practice, culture and civilisation are fused in one; their interwoven unity creates the conception of the new socialist culture.

This new situation has its own subjective side as well, although, until now, it has only figured tendentially in life. One of the most commonly used expressions in Soviet everyday life is 'culturedness [*kulturnost*]'.<sup>6</sup> It indicates the demand that, in each of their activities, everyone should seek to carry out their tasks in a cultivated manner. It means the social demand that culture should permeate in equal measure every person's total labour and their leisure time, 'cultural' activity (that is, 'cultural' in a narrow sense). From the street-car conductor to the member of the scientific-research team, with each and to each, completely open and despite private life, they are striving to make effective this social demand implied by the expression 'culturedness'. It is no accident that, today, in the Soviet Union, the most injurious criticism that one make of a person is that they relate to their own activity 'in a bureaucratic manner' or that they do not carry out their work 'culturally'. Even without a thorough analysis, one can see that, in the everyday life of this world that Lenin constructed, the old great demand of the democratic revolutionaries has been set on a slow, contradictory, winding road to realisation: the ideal of the well-rounded person, harmonious in life and activity in equal measure.

### III

Throughout his whole life, Lenin stood in deadly opposition to any utopianism. According to him, socialism must be built with those people who exist, those whom capitalism has corrupted. Just as, in the view of Marxism, humans emerged from animals and became human through their own labour, so now, in the greatest world-historical change and after, humans through their own social labour must overcome the deforming influences that the millennial development of class society has drilled into their total essence. Only utopians could believe that one could in a *precursory* fashion train a group of people to lead their fellow people into the new life without friction. Lenin, together with Marx, rejected the division of humanity in this manner into two parts, into educators and those to be educated.

If, however, Lenin repeatedly emphasised that the destructive influences of imperialist capitalism permeated the whole of society, this does not mean that

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6. For more on the notion of *kulturnost*, see also Fitzpatrick 1992, and Volkov 2000.

he believed that this influence manifests itself in the same way in every social class. Lenin viewed the socialist transformation of society as the fruit of the self-activity of the entire people, but, along with this, he also emphasised that this transformation is impossible without the leadership role of the working class. Why does the role of leader fall precisely to the working class?

Lenin's response is quite simple. Negatively: among all the classes of society, the working class is to the least degree intertwined with the capitalist tendencies to distort the human essence, which, in the first place, emerge out of exploitation; the class-interests of the working class, consistently thought through and reflected upon, exceed any narrowly understood class-perspective. The class-conscious worker is aware that only through the liberation of the *whole* of society can the working class be liberated as well. Positively: capitalist large-scale industry produces, precisely in the proletariat, the seed of a new human being ready to be born, the new human being who consciously lives, works, and thinks in a social way; for, out of the soil of the industrial proletariat's way of being, grows the most important characteristics of the new socialist morality: the lively feeling for community, the sense of the necessity of working in common, the sentiment of solidarity.

In recognising these spiritual facts, Lenin was not alone. They are so striking in today's life that one cannot take up the fate of culture without taking them into account. And there are many who see in these characteristics of the working class the way out of the present crisis of culture.

However, Lenin's understanding of this question differs widely from the average, common one. On the one hand, he announced unceasingly that only the working class (and in it, the most conscious, consistently revolutionary part) is called to lead the socialist transformation – and, in this regard, he knew no compromise. On the other hand, however, he opposed with equal sharpness those who, particularly since the victory of the Russian Revolution, having recognised the situation of the working class and the problematic nature of capitalist culture, draw narrow and one-sided conclusions.

In Lenin's view, above all, it is necessary to determine the relation of the new culture, which comes into being along with the leading role of the working class, to so-called 'proletarian culture' [Proletcult].<sup>7</sup> There are many who, in the name of 'proletarian culture', rigidly reject the culture of the past, shutting out previous cultural achievements and seeking to conjure from working-class existence and ideology a 'proletarian culture'. Lenin steadfastly rejected every such 'ouvrierism' throughout his life. Already from the outset of the develop-

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7. See, especially, Lenin 1965b, pp. 316–17.

ment of the Russian workers' movement, there were tendencies that wished to found the whole organisational and intellectual construction of the workers' party on a 'pure' workers' ideology spontaneously arising from working-class life. According to Lenin, spontaneity can only be a point of departure for the workers' class-struggles, even in the purely economic domain. According to him, the conscious, true, revolutionary world-view, which comprehends the whole of society, must be imported *from outside* into the workers' movement. This 'outside' means the progressive development of a total culture, generalising the decisive achievements of this development, which every worker must make his or her own to become a self-conscious revolutionary. It is not by chance that Lenin speaks of Marxism's three sources: English classical political economy, French utopian socialism, and the dialectical method developed in Germany. The revolutionary world-view of the proletariat, in Lenin's view, is so much more than that which spontaneously arises from the worker's bare existence.

With regard to content, this conclusion means that the revolutionary world-view of the working class cannot be narrowed down to the simple opposition of capitalist and worker, but, rather, embraces the *whole* set of problems of the *total* development of society. If, thus, with Lenin, we pose the question in this way, then it is clear that the revolutionary world-view of the self-conscious working class does not come into being by workers cutting themselves off from cultural development previously achieved. Only in ceaseless interaction with this cultural development, by criticising its achievements, working through them, further developing them, can the proletariat and especially its most conscious element arrive at that developmental level where it can fulfil its own great historical calling. The final goal of the proletariat's calling is the dialectical withering away of itself. If social classes are eliminated; if exploitation ceases; if the means of production become social means; if social development transcends the division of city and village, physical and intellectual labour; if the meaningfulness, autonomy, and joyful aspect of work can be accomplished for everyone, then *socialist* culture will have come into being, and not 'proletarian culture'.

Lenin's conception of cultural development determined the questions of strategies and tactics in cultural revolution as well. In particular, the question of revolution and reform, of slow progress. As long as it was a question of bringing into being a genuine popular power and clearing away obstacles to real democracy, revolutionary methods necessarily stood at the forefront. Lenin's whole theory of development confirmed through comprehensive analyses how much it was in the interest of the working people to shatter the outdated social framework by revolutionary means. Thus, with great acumen

and enormous mastery of materials, he proved that, in the period of capitalist production, there are two paths to the transformation of the agrarian sphere: the first sweeps out of the way all remnants of feudalism at once; in the other, these feudal elements remain for a long time, in part slowly breaking up and in part slowly growing into the capitalistic exploitation of the peasantry. The conclusion of this scientific research was that the latter pathway meant immeasurably more oppression and suffering for the peasantry than the first, although both – from a purely economic point of view – led to the same outcome, the victory of capitalist production in agriculture. Lenin's accordingly enthusiastic affirmation of revolution did not, therefore, derive from subjective motivations, but, rather, on the contrary, from the recognition of the concrete lawfulness of economic development, parallel to Lenin's burning, heartfelt concern for the working people, for the workers and peasants.

The achieved victory of the revolution, however, already brings the significance of reforms to the fore, the often slow, but, in any case, systematic development of positions already attained. 'Better less, but better': Lenin emphasised this constantly as the fundamental principle of socialist construction. This also means, as we have already discussed in another connection, that Lenin always started building the house from its foundations, so that the nascent socialist culture would have extensive, encompassing qualities as its base.

This work of reform can only be 'better', however, if it proceeds according to plan. The Leninist 'less' was never a single phenomenon just picked out by chance. For Lenin – to use one of his favourite images – it meant that certain link in the chain that one must grasp in order to take in hand the whole chain, so that by means of taking hold of one link we can move on to the furthest, highest degree necessary to the development.

The planned character of the work of reform entails the leading role of the working class and the most self-conscious workers organised into a party. Its goal is to build, in the most developed democracy, with the proletarian dictatorship, a classless society in which even a *proletariat* – in the sense that this term had in class society – would no longer exist. And this leadership is based on the insight that this work of construction can only be completed through the collective power of the whole working people, including the working class, peasantry, and progressive intelligentsia; that for completing this work of construction and reconstruction, not even the most advanced working class, the very best workers' party, will alone suffice. The leading role of the working class thus manifests itself precisely in so far as it activates, politicises, and socialises those strata that in the period of class-society were not capable of such activism, such consciously social activity. For this reason, under working class rule, the progressive intelligentsia is also included in the

work of socialist construction; it is respected, and in the direction decided by the strategy of the working class, it may even assume a leading role. At the same time, the leading role of the working class in the cultural revolution also manifests itself by helping to produce new intellectuals, by making the broad, working masses more culturally demanding and consistent, and simultaneously striving to satisfy these demands. If we said earlier that, in Lenin's view, one must begin building socialism's house by laying its foundations, this does not in the least mean exclusively building from below, just as the initial, necessary emphasis on socialist culture's breadth and extensiveness does not exclude bringing into being and valuing peak-achievements. The deeply democratic characteristics of socialist society manifest themselves in the way that such cultural work is possible from below and from above, at once and in a mutually complementary fashion, so that these two directions meet in the new quality that comes of breadth, in its conversion into depth.

#### IV

These viewpoints determine the re-evaluation of previous and present culture. The advocates of so-called 'proletarian culture' have generally abandoned bourgeois culture, the culture of class society. Their programme was that the reign of the working class should create a 'radically new' culture, science, and art. In practice – and this is no accident, but a necessity – this meant the uncritical assumption of intellectually and artistically decadent currents of the imperialist period. The scientific world-view of the Russian advocates of 'proletarian culture' was founded on Machism, their art on imitating the futurism and expressionism then fashionable in the West; they were, at best, only the further immanent development of these.

Lenin most decidedly rejected this entire tendency. The strength of Marxism, in his view, manifests itself precisely in so far as it has appropriated and critically worked through every progressive tendency in the many millennia of human development. It is self-evident that Lenin greatly emphasised the importance of criticism in this process of appropriation and working-through. For, indeed, the development of world culture in class societies was always and everywhere a struggle of progress and reaction. The official culture of imperialist capitalism exhibits to an ever-greater extent reactionary processes of historical selection and preservation, the foregrounding of reactionary tendencies in history, and the reactionary falsification of the historical past. Lenin's positive relation to the progressively spirited cultural legacy of class societies thus includes, in the way that we receive it in the culture of the present, this legacy's fundamental revision. This revision presupposes the proper



recognition and evaluation of the struggle of progress and reaction, pitiless scorn for reaction, and loving and considerate, although not uncritical care for progressive traditions, or, if necessary, their discovery, support, and wider propagation. In Russia, this outlook meant the ruthless struggle against every tradition of Czarism and feudalism. On the other hand, it also included the recognition of those great progressive tendencies that developed during the Czarist tyranny, and with particularly impressive force in the nineteenth century. It thus means, in the first place, the cult of great Russian realist literature from Pushkin to the present.

The productive influence of this Leninist critique of culture shows itself most clearly in that particular fate that has been Marxism's lot in Russia – and to the present day, only there. Russian Marxism, as a form of Marxism, was naturally an 'imported good' from abroad. Today, it is an organic part of the progressive traditions of Russian culture. Lenin's work has played a decisive role in this development. Lenin is not just the greatest world-scale successor of Marx and Engels; he is also at one with the thought-world of the truly highest quality representatives of Russian-revolutionary democracy. Thus, from the perspective of the victory of Lenin's world-views and actions, it becomes clear that, seen from an objective, world-historical point of view, the greatest Russian-revolutionary democrats – Herzen and Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov – were forerunners of dialectical materialism. All of these, like Marx himself, were concerned with the process of the disintegration of the Hegelian dialectic; all strove to clear out of the Hegelian-dialectical method the idealistic and conservative elements implicit in it. The dialectic is the algebra of revolution, said Herzen.

Thus, without any stretching of the argument, it becomes clear that these great revolutionary-democratic thinkers were on the road from Hegel towards Marx, and that objectively they could be forerunners of the dialectical materialist world-view. Now, supposing Lenin applied this world-view to all the phenomena of Russian life and of the revolution due in Russia, in accordance with the best Russian-revolutionary traditions, he thus sowed Marxism in Russian soil as an organic product. Marxism thus grew up in the traditions of Russian progressive-revolutionary culture, rendering them fruitful and organically developing them further.

We can only truly measure the cultural greatness of this deed if we compare the Russian fate of the Marxist world-view with the role that fell to it in Marx's homeland, Germany. Marx's world-view grew organically out of the soil of the best German-progressive traditions: Lessing, Goethe, and Heine were just as much the forefathers of his world-view as were Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. Nevertheless, to date, Marx's world-view has never become an organic and productive component of German culture.



Lenin's passionate respect for the pinnacles of humankind's progressive development and for classical culture is thus no accident. No accident and no merely private matter, no mere question of individual taste. If Lenin first and foremost emphasised Pushkin, Chernyshevsky, and Tolstoy in Russian cultural development, then he offered assessments that were not only deep and just, but also extremely up-to-date with respect to the development of socialist culture. Here, again, we can only allude to a few characteristic and notable examples from Lenin's rich life work: his re-evaluation of Tolstoy; his profound criticism and application of Hegel's logic; his actualisation of the co-operative dreams of the great utopians.

While the right-wing bourgeois conceived Tolstoy as a mystic and the left-wing bourgeois viewed him as the poet of the Russian aristocracy, Lenin recognised in him the poetic reflection of the development of the Russian peasant-movements and the initiator of a new period in world-literature. In his working-through and critique of Hegel's logic, Lenin identified those truly dialectical elements of the world-view, which carry forward into present-day life, and which, rendered critically conscious, will alone make Marxism a truly effective, comprehensive world-view. In Lenin's view, whoever has not thoroughly studied Hegel's logic can neither understand Marx's *Capital*. Finally, with his analysis of the utopian writers, Lenin demonstrated that their co-operative dreams, which were misleading and, indeed, worthless during the period of capitalism's reign (misleading, because they lead a part of the working class away from the successful road of class struggle), immediately become large-scale, constructive realities, once the working people comes to power, once it possesses the power to organise all or part of the economy.

These evaluations are not isolated, brilliant ideas, but, rather, the necessary consequences of Lenin's method. We have already discussed how Lenin's critique of culture examines the struggle of reaction and progress in historical development, and how on the foundation of a partisanship accompanying the materialist world-view he therefore takes a stand for the progressive tendencies of culture. Yet the struggle of progress and reaction also occurs *in* the individual great personalities of class society, in the souls, world-views, and works of these great persons. Lenin (polemically opposing Plekhanov) explicates his own method of criticising the past: to criticise and destroy the reactionary tendencies in a way that the progressive, positive aspects of the great creators can become valid, so that precisely from sharp criticism we can understand specifically why Hegel was an epoch-making thinker, or why Tolstoy was an epoch-making realist.

Lenin also applied this critical method in the analysis of the ideological crisis of the present time. Of course, here the critical voice is yet sharper than in reference to the past, because the present danger, the ideological misleading

of revolutionaries, is greater. Nevertheless, the positive, progressive element prevails even in these criticisms. When Lenin concerned himself with the epistemology of the physics of his time, demolishing so-called physical idealism with his criticism,<sup>8</sup> he also demonstrated that this idealism, however worthless and reactionary it might be in the field of epistemology, sprang from the development and progressive tendencies of physics. And this positive, progressive aspect may also prove productive in the domain of philosophy as well: it may induce Marxists to abandon the abstract, mechanical definition of matter and take up a new, dialectical-materialist definition. Through sharp, destructive epistemological critique, even this idealism could help establish new tasks for dialectics and thus be turned in a positive direction.

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Throughout his life, Lenin sought the new human being. He struggled to establish the objective economic and social foundations, as well as the moral and intellectual conditions, of bringing this new human being into existence. This new human being will someday unite in himself those great cultural energies produced in the previous flourishing periods: broad and comprehensive openness to the world along with depth in understanding and describing it; the harmonious, mature personality along with social solidarity; the autonomy of labour along with well-developed life of the mind and of emotional and moral culture. Such a flourishing of new and great personalities can only become possible if – objectively – the road leading to culture is open to all.

Lenin lived and struggled for this new person. He himself, indeed, was the first great example of this new person: a representative of a new unsentimental pathos, the pathos of the new life. His was an exemplary life: the most developed moral purity, without any asceticism; intellectual to the highest degree, yet deeply embedded in social practice. Lenin was truly a great man, a great personality, such as has only rarely been produced in the course of human development to this day. A great individual, but not in the sense popular today, the one-of-a-kind, in the sense of someone never-to-be-seen-again. It is perhaps the most brilliant result of Lenin's personality that he left behind him work that could be continued by his great successor, Stalin.

January 1946

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8. See Lenin 1972b, an attempt to check the influence of Ernst Mach's influence among some Russian Social Democrats.

## Chapter Four

### Literature and Democracy I

#### I

Bourgeois society develops two sides of the person, indeed with so much divisive energy that – for bourgeois self-consciousness – personhood seems almost to break into two separate beings: the private person, the ‘man’ as it was once customary to say, and the citizen. The great democratic revolutions, which proclaimed the sanctity of the rights of man, made a sharp distinction between the human being (the private person, civilian, bourgeois) and the citizen [*citoyen*].

However much this duality is self-evident in bourgeois society, it is, equally, not an eternally valid structure or precondition of social life. The members of the ruling class of classical antiquity derived all their rights and privileges from being citizens; all private aspects of their lives were just appendages of their citizenship. And, in precisely the opposite manner, in the system of medieval privileges everything was contained in the relationships, private in nature, between men grouped according to the feudal hierarchy; here the general, that which pertains to the citizen, appears as a function of the private connections between men. These differences are closely related to the economic forms in which different systems of exploitation – slavery, serfdom, wage-labour – manifest themselves. In contrast, the duality sketched above characterises bourgeois culture.

This duality plays an important role in the whole cultural development of the nineteenth century. It is

even further strengthened by those necessary forms whereby the economic bases of the capitalist system of production are reflected in people's heads and play a role in their thoughts and feelings. This distorted projection of the fundamental economic and social relations, which comes necessarily into being, Marx called fetishism. Summarising this expression briefly, it designates how these economic, social, and political relations, which in their ultimate reality are *relationships between human beings*, appear in the self-consciousness of the person in capitalist society as if objects and things were confronting people. There comes into being the false appearance that only the person's subjective inner life and completely private connections with other people have 'human' qualities, while society itself is constituted by objective, dead 'things', 'objects', and is not the totality and whole system of relationships of persons to one another. In such a distortion of self-consciousness in capitalist society this appearance takes on a solid, psychological grounding, as if the relations and problems of citizenship, public affairs, and the questions of public life were mere *abstractions* in opposition to the concrete reality of subjective, individual, private life.

In this development of self-consciousness, the democratic or anti-democratic social system plays a decisive role. Even when taken on its own, the capitalist social order has an isolating effect on people: it trains in them an egoism that divides person from person. The more developed the production of capitalism, the more powerfully that socially-necessary appearance is manifest, according to which the isolated singular person – the isolated atom of society, the 'windowless monad' – stands opposed to the purely object-like and thingy society, inhuman in its relations. Public life, that is, the social and political side of the individual's life, becomes ever more 'reified', fetishistic.

Now, every reactionary régime, indeed every régime that is not consistently democratic, consciously or not strengthens this misdirected development and crippling of bourgeois self-consciousness. Expressly reactionary régimes do this consciously, directly developing a 'world-view' out of this privatisation of bourgeois self-consciousness. This trend was manifest in a particularly marked way in nineteenth-century Germany, where the citizen's self-consciousness died out in almost the entire people. Yet that liberalism that dreads the participation of the masses and is in its basic disposition anti-democratic strives to exercise a similarly oriented ideological influence, although utilising different methods. Widespread trumpeting of the Louis-Philippe 'Get rich!' sort of slogan encouraged this sort of privatisation of citizen consciousness,<sup>1</sup> and the liberal-political theories that later followed, such

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1. The years of Louis-Philippe's reign were a crucial period in the development of capitalist economy and bourgeois-urban culture in France, as well as a crucible for the popular forces that would explode in the 1848 events.

as those concerning political expertise, also served to accelerate and deepen this development.

Only serious democratic social tendencies are able to awaken in people the feeling that public affairs are, at the same time, also *inner* matters of *every* person, and that the person who does not participate in public life and does not live the life of the citizen – also as an individual, as a private person – is not a whole person, but rather is stunted. Not by chance, it was one of the nineteenth century's greatest narrative writers and at the same time one of the most passionate advocates of Swiss democracy, Gottfried Keller, who expressed this thought most trenchantly, saying: 'everything is political'.

These fundamental tendencies exerted a decisive influence on both the content and style of nineteenth-century literature. Every truly important writer who took his vocation seriously strove to overcome and surpass the duality of private person and citizen. In this struggle, in which great literature defended its integrity against the effects of the capitalist system of production, which distorts both people and art, we see two ways in which great writers, in defending themselves, also go on the attack.

On the one hand, we see the great poetic representatives of the citizen-principle, the literary bearers of the political and social responsibility of the individual. Such writers want to incite, to preach, to bring about change. Not only to relations, but also in particular to people themselves. Thus it is not accidental that from Percy Bysshe Shelley to Vladimir Mayakovsky the great literary representatives of this type have been lyric poets (Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady, József Attila). But even when in the larger part of their life-work other genres were in the foreground, lyric pathos dominated their depictions (Friedrich Schiller, Victor Hugo). I have spoken in detail about this type in my lecture entitled 'Poetry of the Party'.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, there are the great realists, the historians of social life. Their situation is more complicated. Their immediate theme, naturally, is the private life of people in capitalist society, as it has been really shaped by capitalism's development, namely, as 'reified' and privatised, as a life in which public affairs seem only to register as a distant horizon.

Yet, the great realists are great because they do not identify this givenness, the obligatory form in which bourgeois society necessarily appears, with the essence of reality. Above all: a genuinely great realist never recognises as truly real that 'reified' appearance. It is clear to him that everything that happens to the person – both inside and outside – is brought about by the reciprocal effects of relations between people. Thus he immediately translates every such fetishistic appearance and manifestation into their true reality: into the

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2. See pp. 105–128 in this volume.

language of concrete relations and connections between people. Consider Balzac, Dickens, Tolstoy: they deal with money and politics and the administration of justice, and these are always presented by them as concrete human connections.

This humanistic world-view of the great realists thus also means that, for them, the duality of private and public affairs, of private person and citizen, has been suspended. In so far as everywhere and at all times they depict the human *totality* and the *total* human being, they see both aspects of these dualities together in the human being itself. And as a necessary consequence, every 'case' – however private in character it might be in its external form, or however deeply, in a poetic work, it penetrates into the psychology of the individual – becomes a public affair in their eyes. Consider the bankruptcy of Birotteau or General Hulot's love passions in Balzac, or the sufferings of Dickens's Copperfield as a child and youth, or Duke Neklyudov's conscience-stricken attempt to take action to save his soul in Tolstoy, or the murder committed by Raskolnikov as an experiment on his own soul in Dostoyevsky:<sup>3</sup> all such 'cases', however individual, emerge far from any mere subjectivity or merely from private life's narrow field of vision. It is a superficial and flattening, modern spiritual interpretation if some washed-out 'universal human being' is elicited to illustrate this effect. The effect is universal, but universal because it is a concern of the total human being, because it is a public affair, because it is a matter of the whole society.

At this point, the organic relationship of the artistic and creative principle of the great realists to democratic tendencies towards the transformation of society becomes comprehensible. In a negative sense, this relationship is immediately and clearly visible: an undemocratic (especially reactionary) régime is not able to tolerate the open exposure of reality, neither in public life, nor in literature. Between France and Germany before World War I, the real difference was not that under the reign of the Hohenzollerns, there were not affairs like the Panama scandal or the Dreyfus affair,<sup>4</sup> but rather that French

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3. Birotteau: from Honoré de Balzac, *César Birotteau* (1837); General Hulot: from Balzac, *La Cousine Bette* (1846); Copperfield: from Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850); Duke Neklyudov: from Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection* (1899); Raskolnikov: from Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1866).

4. The Panama Scandal was a huge corruption scandal that broke out in 1892 following the bankruptcy and liquidation of the Panama Canal Company. It was revealed that many lawmakers had taken bribes to help cover up the company's losses, which led to millions being lost by thousands of French citizens who had invested in the company.

The Dreyfus affair began in 1894 when an army officer of Jewish origin, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, was convicted of treason. Despite evidence that Dreyfus was innocent and another major was the guilty party, Dreyfus continued to bear the blame of espionage. French intellectuals took up positions for and against Dreyfus, precipitating a

democracy brought all such cases before public opinion and made a 'public affair' of them while in Germany – and here in Hungary as well – any such matter remained the 'private affair' of the involved stratum. This difference is reflected in the divergent character and voice of German and French literature in this period. Émile Zola and Anatole France thus not only intervened in the Dreyfus affair, and became intellectual leaders for a renewal of French public life, a role occupied by no writer in Germany; but also their literary activity and the particularity of their realism reflected this active intervention, setting them apart from German literary development.

Still more important, however, is the positive connection: the truly great realist, precisely in so far as under his penetrating gaze, every fetishistic 'thing' again becomes human – a relationship between human beings – neither does he tolerate any fetish in the depiction of the social situation of human beings. He properly sees the struggle of social forces from above downward and from below upward, and even if his (private) political conviction is conservative, as Balzac's in fact was, he still sees those forces as they are, free of the writer's own possible prejudices. And this absence of prejudice necessarily leads the writer in the direction of a just recognition of the great, repressed power of the people and a delicate, understanding sympathy towards them.

We are not even speaking here about such plebeian-spirited realists as Dickens and Keller, nor about the politically democratically-inclined Stendhal, who, not by chance, gave shape to the figure of the popular revolutionary Palla Ferrante.<sup>5</sup> Tolstoy's sympathy with the peasantry is common knowledge. But not only will the peasant Platon Karetaev be the human and moral teacher of the aristocrat Pierre Bezukhov,<sup>6</sup> who is seeking his way; rather – although Tolstoy in his overall world-view despised revolution and condemned the revolutionaries – *Resurrection's* Katjusa Maslova is brought back to a vivid, humane life by the human greatness of these revolutionaries, by their life full of sacrifice for the public good. And if we seek truly positive heroes in the works of the legitimist Balzac, then we hit upon the heroes of the barricades at the Saint Merry cloister,<sup>7</sup> or the revolutionary, republican soldiers and officers

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major political crisis. Among the key voices was the novelist Émile Zola, who published his famous *J'accuse* in January 1898; he had to flee to England to escape imprisonment for this publication. Eventually, in 1906, Dreyfus was completely exonerated.

5. Ferrante Palla: poet-republican character in Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839).

6. Karataev and Bezukhov: characters in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–69).

7. With the 'barricades at the Saint Merry cloister', a site of the July Revolution street fighting, Lukács probably alludes to Balzac's 1839 novel, *Les secrets de la Princesse de Cardignan*, in which a Republican admirer killed on the barricade figures in a deceitful tale a woman spins for one of her lovers. The 'soldiers and officers fighting in counter-revolutionary Brittany' appear in Balzac's early Walter Scott-influenced historical novel, *Les Chouans* (1829).

fighting in counter-revolutionary Brittany. Even in the darkest novel [*Éducation sentimentale*] of the deeply pessimistic Flaubert, we find such a truly positive hero: the simple shopkeeper, who without phraseology or pose falls at the last barricade of the failed 1848 Revolution.

The great realists – in their works and in their depictions – are always allies of democracy, whether they know it or not, and whether they like or not; assuming that they are really great realists.

The great literary backlashes against serious realism also confirm this connection. It is true that Zola's naturalism was already just a weak echo of great French realism. But the counter-movement begun by Paul Bourget and his associates only apparently, only superficially was directed merely at methods of composition, favouring the analysis of the inner life of the soul over the depiction of external, social life. The true essence of the new trend reveals itself clearly in the thematics; it signals a turn away from popular life and flight inward to the subjective spiritual world of the non-labouring, upper strata. In terms of the content and poetic world-view, this, in turn, meant compelling acceptance of conservative, reactionary facts of social life as unchangeable powers that confront people almost in a transcendent and absolute way. Thus, literary psychologism not only restores the capitalist productive system's surface-appearance, which is socially-necessary in its genesis, yet objectively false: that is, the private person. Rather, in the poetic depiction as well, it seeks to justify the 'reification' and fetishisation of the social surface. This developmental process is even more clearly visible in the turn in Russian literature away from realism, following the defeat of the 1905 revolution, with Dmitri Merezhkovsky, the later Leonid Andrejev, and Mikhail Artsybasev.<sup>8</sup> For these writers, the poetic dominance of the erotic theme was deployed as a conscious polemic against the realism that was preparing the ground for democratic revolutions. The person exclusively living out his adventures in love was set up as an ideal in contrast to the revolutionary, who lost his 'individuality', because he sacrificed it to the phantom of public affairs. The artistic struggle against realism here pushes the private person to the foreground, in contrast to the putatively 'abstract', inhuman, impersonal citizen.

## II

If now, with the help of the viewpoints we have established, we take a glance at the development of Hungarian literature, then we have to assert that it has never passed through the period of great realism, understood in the French and Russian sense.

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8. All three authors ended up opposing and writing against the Bolsheviks.



Let us strive to keep at bay any misunderstanding: what is at issue here is the specifically modern realism of the nineteenth century (Balzac, Dickens, Tolstoy). In the 1840s, a far-reaching and genuinely popular realism [e.g. *János vitéz*, *Toldi*]<sup>9</sup> – corresponding to Hungary’s social development at that time – was coming into being in our country. Yet not only was this realism specifically Hungarian in its subject-matter, but also in its form, compositional mode, and means of expression, it grew out of the particular Hungarian conditions of the 1840s. On the one hand, it expresses the radicality and power of popular aspects of the Hungarian-democratic revolution that was getting underway at this time. On the other hand, it also expresses its immaturity – from the point of view of the revolution’s successfully being carried to completion, which politically revealed itself in the petty gentry’s leadership of the 1848 Revolution, in the fact that this revolution did not have an urban, bourgeois, and plebeian basis determining its direction.

The other literary-expressive mode corresponding to this degree of political and social development was the prose style growing out of narrative anecdote. This fresh, popular style was, if in a fragmentary way, also genuinely epic; however, it was not capable of truly novelistic-epic synthesis [Mór Jókai]. Here it is not a matter of the degree of poetic talent, but, rather, of social development. The history of composition of the modern-realist novel and drama everywhere reflects the unitary formation of bourgeois society resulting from the economic development of capital. The unification of the loose episodic nature of the old novels into a great unitary composition is the mirror-image of the unification of bourgeois society in an authentic, revolutionary manner. The anecdotal looseness of the emerging Hungarian epic, thus, was not the analogue of contemporary Western-European developments, but, rather, of epic forms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Between the semi-feudal classes, classes separated by hardly violable feudal boundaries, there could *objectively* not exist the degree of reciprocal influence that could, in its literary reflection, give rise to truly novelistic, unitary, and realist composition. Jokai himself, later, by means of stylistic devices (imports from French romanticism), created an individually attractive and interesting unification, but one incapable of being continued.

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9. Sándor Petöfi’s long poem, *János vitéz* (1845), narrates the romance of a peasant-orphan who joins the hussars and travels about Europe and elsewhere, having numerous adventures, heroic and fantastic; he is raised to the status of knight, wanders to the end of the world, is magically reunited to his lost love, and is crowned king of the Land of Fairies. János Arany’s *Toldi* (1846, 1848, 1879) is an epic trilogy about the hero, Miklós Toldi, a knight in the army of the 14th-century Hungarian king Lajos the Great.

Novelistic realism in the modern sense only came into being on the terrain of history and the historical novel (József Eötvös, Kemény).<sup>10</sup> But the social development of the Hungarian bourgeoisie did not drive this tendency onward from a realistic recognition of the past to the realistic clarification of the present, as in the West from Walter Scott's historicism emerged the social universality of the *Human Comedy*, or from *War and Peace* came *Anna Karenina's* realistic depiction of the present.

Our task here cannot be to offer a survey of Hungarian literary history. We must only establish the main vectors of social development. We will not speak about the Western states; but, rather, let us consider Russia, where, on the one hand, large, characteristically Russian cities and an urban bourgeoisie developed, and on the other hand, the urban bourgeois and plebeian strata took over, relatively early, the leadership of the reform-movement from the nobility (Decembrism and the development that began in the 1840s).<sup>11</sup> This reform-movement passed through many difficult periods and crises, but never suffered such a decisive, annihilating defeat like the Hungarian revolution in 1849.<sup>12</sup> These conditions make understandable how literary development could soon outgrow the period of populist romanticism (already with Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, and Mikhail Lermontov) and how the social foundation of great realism in the modern sense very rapidly was established.

In Hungary, the direction of development was completely different. After the failure of the revolution, economically – to a continuously increasing extent – the transition to capitalism was occurring; however, politically and socially there was no such modern democracy and urban-bourgeois culture emerging that could bring together, unify, and direct the progressive development of the whole country. The decisive factor in the unfolding of Hungarian life and the development of Hungarian culture was that both after the failure of the revolution and in the midst of the transition to capitalism in Hungary, the gentry, allied with the high aristocracy, remained the governing class in political and social life. However, this continuity and persistence is far

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10. Lukács saw in the works of Eötvös and Kemény hints of an emerging national epic literature, but an emergence fatally compromised by the historic failure to achieve a democratic-national bourgeois revolution in Hungary.

11. The Decembrist Revolt was an uprising of 3,000 soldiers protesting Nicholas I's assumption as Tsar of Russia; it took place on 14 December 1825 and was suppressed. Poet Alexander Pushkin was friendly with the Decembrists and fell under suspicion during the reprisals that followed.

12. Following uprisings in 1848 and a complete declaration of independence in 1849, the Hungarian independence-army was crushed by Austrian and Russian troops. Thirteen Hungarian rebel-generals were seized and executed at Arad on 6 October 1849, thus decimating the leadership of the independence-struggle.

from signifying that the gentry's inner qualities, social function, and spiritual and moral framework remained the same as before the revolution, in the pre-1848 reform-era, when they had deservedly constituted the leading, direction-giving stratum of national renewal.

To a steadily increasing degree, the development of capitalism in Hungary transformed the gentry into a parasitic stratum. This development has the closest relation to the turn in national development occasioned by the 1867 compromise;<sup>13</sup> until 1848, national and social regeneration was the goal, and now, under the protectorate of Austria and the Habsburgs, it became the oppression of the working people, both Hungarian and those of the national minorities. This parasitism was necessarily accompanied by the gentry's steadily intensifying moral and cultural degeneration, its inner decay. It was thus characteristic of the Hungarian development that corresponding to upward development in the purely economic sense was not only a reactionary social and political stagnation, but also the ever more notable decline in the intellectual and moral quality of the pace-setting stratum in Hungarian culture, its inner corruption.

The gentry's leading role in the development of Hungarian culture at first simply displayed a conservative character, the rigid rejection of everything that derived from an expressly capitalist civilisation, from the West. The urban intelligentsia, without roots on a countrywide scale, opposed to the gentry, formed in parallel with the unfolding of the capitalist system of production. The rootlessness of the urban intelligentsia found its image in the spinelessness of its political, social, and literary manifestations – especially at first, but in many respects throughout its whole development.<sup>14</sup> This

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13. The 1867 compromise formed the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. The Hungarian Crown was made legally equal, but de facto remained under the domination of Austria, which retained the upper hand through the unified army and other elements of the imperial state-apparatus. In turn, the Austrian and Hungarian crowns divided up the domination of the various territories and nationalities that constituted the empire. Lukács considered the compromise as a product of the defeat of the radical independence movement of 1848 and the fateful condition under which Hungarian capitalism subsequently developed in a social context still heavily marked by the social and cultural remnants of gentry feudalism.

14. Lukács here paints in broad strokes the trajectory leading from the weak, dependent development of an urban bourgeois culture in the years following 1867 up to the 'urbanist'/'populist' cultural split that heavily marked Hungarian literary culture between the World Wars. Informed by popular front views, Lukács particularly stressed the debilitating effect of the ideological and practical divisions between one sector of Hungary's intellectuals, relatively progressive and urban but cut off from the potentially revolutionary aspirations of the peasantry, and another group, which was genuinely plebeian, radical, and rooted in the villages but also susceptible to irrationalism, anti-Semitism, and manipulation in fascist political directions. He takes up the question of the 'urbanist'/'populist' divide in several essays in this volume,

tendency was reinforced by the character of Hungarian capitalism, which was not autonomous but dependent on Vienna. Just as the economic and political leaders of Hungarian capitalism satisfied themselves with obtaining economic and political advantages reachable through the back door (and often by greasing palms along the way), with attainment of individual positions, so too for a long time did the majority of those in urban culture and literature as well. Herein lies the basis of our urban literature's apolitical character, its horror of social problems, its awkward grasp and timidity. But this rootlessness is also tangible where its intentions are serious and subjectively honourable. The Hungarian urban-bourgeois intellectual has never felt any collective power backing him up; estranged from the village, in the city, in contrast, the working class, to an ever-increasing extent, is the active bearer of the movement of the masses. Thus, among this intelligentsia, left to itself and thrown back upon itself, intellectual experiment dominates, the uncritical reception of the newest Western tendencies and even fashions.

After World War I, these tendencies flourished even more clearly. The weight of difficulties grew even heavier on urban culture. The gentry maintained its own leading social and political role across the revolutions, carrying, of course, its parasitic degeneration to a higher degree as well. A new phenomenon in Hungarian culture – about which we will later speak in detail – was the stirring among the peasantry, the emergence of a peasant-intelligentsia, the peasantry gaining a voice in Hungarian literature. This has been the greatest positive cultural and literary development in the last quarter-century. Here, where presently we can sketch only the most general traits of this progress, we are compelled to state that, in counter-revolutionary Hungary, the gap between the culture and literature of city and countryside grew even more.<sup>15</sup> (About this, read my essay 'The Writer's Responsibility'.)<sup>16</sup> The division of the progressive elements of city and countryside made it possible for the counter-revolution to develop its reactionary tendencies every more powerfully, until

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but especially in 'Populist Writers in the Balance'. Lukács also wrote an important, earlier assessment of the populist movement from the Soviet Union in 1941, which already reflects Lukács's hope that progressive elements of the populist movement might be detached from ideologies that rendered them susceptible to fascism, either passively or actively, and that they might be persuaded to enter into an anti-fascist, democratic front. See Lukács 1945c, also in Lukács 1970, pp. 229–46.

15. Lukács alludes, primarily, to the 'urbanist'/'populist' split that developed during the 'counter-revolutionary period' following the failure of the Hungarian Commune of 1919.

16. Lukács refers to an essay he wrote in the Soviet Union in 1939, commenting on the journal-book of the populist poet Gyula Illyés entitled *Magyarok* [Hungarians]. It appeared in Lukács's booklet, *Az Irástudok Felelőssége*, published in Moscow in 1944 and in book-form, in Hungary, immediately following Lukács's return in 1945.

they grew over into the short, ignominious reign of the Hungarian fascist régime that was so ruinous for our country.<sup>17</sup> How this development led to our country's ruin is already known to everyone; thus, it is not necessary that we discuss it in this connection.

### III

The development that we have very sketchily set out here shows at least this: that there was not, and could not have been, a great realist period in Hungarian literary development. From every perspective, the peak of the reigning literature was the epic form developed by Kálmán Mikszáth; it also marked the height of the old Hungarian-narrative culture that developed out of anecdotalism. On the one hand, it comprised, with great acuity, the self-critique of the decadence of the gentry; on the other hand, at the same time – unwittingly – it exposed the literary limits of this approach and tendency. In his depiction of social life, private and public life, Mikszáth is the polar opposite of great European realism. Whereas there, as we have seen, the singular cases of individual and private life always become public matters, in Mikszáth, public affairs are depicted (of course with humour, even irony) as the narrow private affairs of the reigning gentry-stratum. From this derives the complete lack of perspective in Mikszáth's world. From this also – in sharp contrast with the joviality of the anecdotal-narrative style – comes the deep pessimism of his world-picture. In the period following Mikszáth, these tendencies became a flat and shallow adornment of the world of the gentry – whether done in good or bad faith, in a qualified manner or cynically affirmative.

Yet, neither were the urban, bourgeois opponents of the official literature capable of producing a true realism. (Ady's lyric poetry and Zsigmond Móricz's epic novels<sup>18</sup> were completely isolated, remaining, for a long time, parts of Hungarian literature without successors.) Naturally, the urbanist literature depicted private life with different content and form than the official, reigning literature, but in it too, private matters in most cases remain purely private affairs. Indeed, in connection with the rootlessness of the urban

17. The 'Arrow Cross' collaborationist régime, led by Ferenc Szálasi, was in power from October 1944 to April 1945, having, on the instigation of Nazi Germany, deposed Admiral Horthy, who was trying to negotiate a separate peace with the Soviets. The Arrow Cross period was a reign of unbridled fascist terror, during which racist violence and mass-deportations to the death-camps were increasingly intense.

18. Móricz's work, especially associated with realist depiction of peasant-social life, was prized by Lukács for its plebeian orientation (which Móricz also expressed in leftist-political engagement) and its epic, realist aspirations.

intelligentsia we sketched above, the ever more powerful, decadent anti-realist tendencies in the West conquered the Hungarian-urban bourgeoisie very early. Outside Hungary, these supplanted realism; here, they obstructed its coming into being.

It is not difficult to see the social roots of the popularity and the enduring, spreading influence of modern anti-realism, which outlives the withering of the different individual literary trends. It is clear that the development of capitalist production, which reshaped the economic and social life of the country, primarily gave new form to Budapest, the capital-city. Corresponding to the political relations we have already sketched, this new formation became tangible in the first instance in private life, family-life, love-life, morality, and so on. It is likewise natural that the new, bourgeois intelligentsia that took shape under these conditions and who were in large part excluded from public life, sought ideological support for undergird their right to exist and justify their cultural vocation. On the one hand, they discovered this in opposing their principles of pure science and art to the artistic distortions and scientific falsifications of the reigning gentry. Almost everywhere, art-for-art, the 'ivory-tower', has similar – oppositional – social roots. In Hungary, it became the ideology of a bourgeois intelligentsia that was incapable of action, that did not dare to commit itself to social action, yet, at the same time, defended the values of culture against the steadily increasing lack of culture among the gentry.

On the other hand, however, in the absence of social activity on the part of the bourgeoisie, this ideology shifted into the cult of the abstract concept of progressiveness (often into snobbery). In so far as serious social measures were not at the disposal of this cultural activity, 'modernity' became its measure. This even became the life-goal of the best and brightest: to 'surge ahead' of cultural development, to bring home the 'latest' from Paris, and so on. And, in so far as our domestic social conditions did not favour great realism, in so far as the anti-realist decadent tendencies flooded in, one after the other, from the West as the very newest artistic trends, they became irresistibly victorious in recent Hungarian literature. (When the time comes to give a serious historical assessment of Zsigmond Móricz, it will become clear that, if perhaps not politically, then at least artistically, he was even more tragically isolated than Ady. Then, it will be evident how heroic, if not always completely conscious and artistically successful, a struggle he waged until the end of his life, against the tendencies that were unfavourable, indeed opposed to great realism.)

In the period between the two world wars, the tendencies on both sides became sharper. Counter-revolution's ever more oppressive and reactionary reign was paralleled by the urban, liberal bourgeoisie's dread of any revolutionary mobilisation; this only occasioned an intensification of these liter-

ary trends. Urban literature, thus, ever more decisively turned 'inward'; in content, it treated, almost exclusively, individual psychology and individual private life; formally, it oriented towards an angular style completely closed in upon itself, an arrogant and conceited autonomy of form. The pressure of censorship compelled writers to allusiveness, to hints hidden between the lines; from this, a certain kind virtuosity developed in the period. Yet, there was no real oppositional content seriously directed against the system. The best representatives of urban literature really decisively rejected reaction and fascism – yet only, so to speak, to protect their individual literary integrity. Literary struggle against reaction, realistic exposure of the social structure of the Hungarian reaction, realistic unveiling of the new direction of Hungarian life did not follow.

We get an essentially different picture looking at that literature which, as we emphasised above, signifies the truly new and positive. The essential feature of the new literature is the revelation, true to reality, of the Hungarian peasantry's social situation, the suffering, and lack of perspective. Here, truly new elements enter into Hungarian literature. But the social unhealthiness of developments until now puts its stamp on these tendencies as well. Above all: a substantial portion of the new peasant-literature inherits the pessimism of the declining gentry society, its lack of perspective.<sup>19</sup> For the gentry, this pessimism and lack of perspective is completely understandable, since it is that social stratum which – without, of course, daring to confess it to themselves – senses its own social irrelevance and obsolescence. (This is already palpable in Mikszáth, and Móricz, of course, already polemically and often movingly depicted such types 'from without'.) If, however, it is a question of a social stratum like the peasantry, which still stands at the beginning of its struggle for liberation and its social development, and whose true vocation is to take part in the liberation and renewal of the nation, then this pessimism is not an organically constitutive element of the peasantry's world-view, but, rather, a certain symptom of the ideological poisoning rooted in being unable to break from the old ruling strata and their false, reactionary traditions. (The reason for this situation, and its consequence as well, is that the alliance of the peasantry with the working class – the only real path to the liberation of the peasantry – has only with great difficulty gained ground with the peasantry's literary representatives, the new peasant-intelligentsia, and, for a long time, has not completely prevailed.)

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19. Lukács is especially alluding to the contradictions of the radical 'populist' writers such as Gyula Illyés (1902–83) and Péter Veres (1897–1970), in whose work he perceives the lineaments of a new, genuinely popular-democratic culture in Hungary.



Of course, there were, then, plenty of reasons for pessimism. But we must not neglect to say that a portion of the rural-populist intelligentsia made a veritable cult out of pessimism and lack of perspective, which they viewed as the adequate form in which spiritual superiority and true cultivation could manifest themselves. This ideological poisoning by the dangerous traditions of the past is the artistic reason and philosophical basis for the reigning pessimistic, perspectiveless, anti-realist tendencies of Western decadence in a portion of rural-populist literature, just as in a segment of the liberal urban intelligentsia to which it is opposed.

Far be it from me to see László Cs. Szabó as in any way a representative writer. But, in one place, involuntarily and unconsciously, he blurts out the secret, indicating more clearly than others have, why Western decadence has exercised so strong an influence in these circles as well. At one point in his *Hungarian Spectator*, László Cs. Szabó quotes Jean Giono. Let us have a look at this quotation and the author's commentary:

'If he wanted to say something to the boss's face for being a shit, well, he said it to his face and for this he did not need a trade-union nor ten thousand, united workers, he said it face to face, as is customary between men. What should he have been afraid of? He had a craft.'

Thus Giono, in his letter addressed to the peasants, writes about his shoemaker father. And likewise Péguy writes about his relatives who work in the spinning rooms of Orleans. And Huxley likewise of the Italians before the War. Literature's sole cry of lament from the Danube to America (it may no longer be possible from the Volga): the Spirit seeks the man, like Hercules seeks the vanished Hylas. But to the cry only the collective leaves of grass respond.

You do not believe it? Look around. What you will see is the revolt of the half-cultivated.<sup>20</sup>

We quoted this passage, in itself not particularly interesting, because in it the social significance of today's fashionable decadent literature and thought stands before us with unusual clarity, without the mumbo-jumbo that usually dresses it up as deep wisdom. 'The Spirit seeks the man', almost everywhere terribly in vain; but, at last, Giono and the peasant find one another. And the social content of this great encounter is that a shoemaker is not in a trade-

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20. Szabó 1939, p. 79. Cs. Szabó quotes in Hungarian translation from Jean Giono's passionately anti-modern and pacifist essay of 1938, *Lettre aux paysans sur la pauvreté et la paix*: 'Il voulait dire merde à son patron (c'est aussi une joie parfois) il disait merde à son patron; et pour le faire il n'avait besoin ni de syndicat, ni de se réunir avec dix mille autres ouvriers; il le lui disait face à face, entre hommes. De quoi aurait-il eu peur? Il avait un métier.' – Giono 1983, p. 71.



union and is being individually rude to his boss. What is important here is that he is not in a trade-union, thus that he does not belong to the 'collective leaves of grass', to the 'half-cultivated'. The individualism of modern decadence, which hates and trembles at every mobilisation of the masses, is so 'over-refined' that it takes aesthetic and ideological pleasure from the anarchic outbreak of anger in the backward peasant or craftsman. The fact that some of our rural-populist writers read and esteem Giono (and Spengler, Ortega y Gasset, and so on) reveals the ideological co-habitation of peasant-backwardness with the moral nihilism sucked up from the corruption of the gentry.

This mixture of backwardness and over-refinement, and the ideological confusion in the important questions of how to liberate the peasantry – a confusion that makes this mixture possible – are the reason why numerous books disclosing the facts of peasant-life are only so many photographs, rather than research exposing the developmental tendencies, mere 'sociography' and not the revelation of social laws. Indeed, very often, if there have been attempts to go beyond the bare registration of facts, these have in part been reactionary and misleading to the masses. (For instance: the 'third way', the 'revolution of quality', and similar).<sup>21</sup> Of course, all this emerged under the pressure of censorship. Yet, this fact still cannot redeem its ideological and, related, poetic weaknesses. If it was possible under the counterrevolutionary censorship to write and publish a book such as Gyula Illyés's *Petőfi*<sup>22</sup> – just to pick one outstanding example – why was such a level of quality, revolutionary resolve, clarity of thought, and determined structure so rare in the rural populists's original, interesting, and path-breaking literature? It is clear that the answer lies not with the pressure of censorship, but rather with the inner, ideological confusion of this literature. Pessimism, lack of perspective, the cult of decadence in art and world-view opened the door to the influx of every kind of reactionary, even fascist ideology. Serious talents fell victim to this; even those who were otherwise outstanding, wavered and went astray in the confusion.

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21. Lukács refers to the interwar-writings of the brilliant but erratic novelist, playwright, literary critic, and social critic, László Németh (1901–75), who was a key-figure in the politics of the populist movement both before and after World War II. Németh rejected Marxism and, under the influence of Spengler and Ortega y Gasset, proposed a utopian, Hungarian-nationalist 'socialism of quality'. Lukács saw him as a serious ideological danger – and, one might say, rival cultural polymath – who might contribute to tipping the important populist movement towards an alliance with fascism, or at least disincite its intellectuals to combat it forcefully. A prolific writer, Németh laid out his views in numerous books, but especially important is his four-volume work, *A Minőség Forradalma*, Németh 1940a. The topics of the four volumes show Németh's comprehensive cultural ambitions for this historical moment: Europe, Towards a New Encyclopedia, Hungarian Spirit, Movement.

22. Ilyes 1973, originally published in Hungarian in 1936.

All these ideological weaknesses must therefore be seen clearly and sharply criticised because even taking into account the weaknesses, the rural-populist literary movement is the most important Hungarian literary achievement of the last quarter-century. But to have a real transformation of Hungarian literature from this important starting point, we need yet further steps and further ideological clarification. Because, during the counter-revolutionary period, the rural-populist movement did not bring the split in Hungarian literature to an end; on the contrary, it made the split even deeper. Of course, a really large part of this comes from the obtuse distrust on the part of the 'urbanists', of everything that comes from the peasantry, their incomprehension of the provisional errors of honest, path-seeking writers. But a part of the perpetuation of this split also comes from the anti-urbanism, peasant-syndicalism, and reactionary utopias deriving from romantic anti capitalism among a segment of the rural populists, tendencies that pushed individual writers quite far to the Right.

#### IV

The liberation of Hungary was not brought about by a revolution. There were no genuine revolutionary struggles in which people and along with them, their views, their world-views, could have been seriously transformed. Today's situation is characterised by generalised dissatisfaction, both in literature and among progressive readers. Among the latter, a mood of impatience reigns, expecting a new literature for new times; on the other hand, a substantial number of writers impatiently reject any such demand: they want to continue whence and in the same manner as before the change. For the writer, as for the public, this change, decisively registered in social content but not revolutionary with respect to existing forms, has raised difficult problems of orientation. It transpires that writers are themselves thrown headfirst into daily affairs, from which many of them then shrink back in fright. One hears the suggestion that writers should just wait calmly, that it takes a long time for events to be truly digested, for the appropriate literary elaboration of the change in society. Is there a way out of this chaos of opinions? Or, rather, will the new democracy, in a literary sense, simply be the continuation of the past and suffer with it the heavy legacy of estrangement of the better part of literature from the questions decisive for the fate of society and nation? And will it, in this way, continue to occupy an isolated place in the cultural life of the nation?

We believe that both opposed extremes pose the question of the timeliness of literature, precisely today of decisive importance, in an incorrect way. It is

beyond question that having a genuine literature that grasps the questions of the day in a proper, passionately democratic, and poetically powerful way offers enormous support for any contemporary social transformation (e.g. Petőfi, Ady). But this *immediate* orientation towards the questions of the day does not completely exhaust the question of literature's timeliness. After the July Revolution, Balzac wrote novels that covered the history and structure of French society from the great French Revolution to the July Revolution; after 1870, Zola began his great cycle, which sought to depict every manifestation of life during the Second Empire, and so on. Were these great writers 'timely'? Without doubt. Even despite the fact that only in 1890 did Zola arrive at the literary depiction of the War of 1870.

Included here is the role of the authentic historical novel as well. Walter Scott's novels date from the period after the passing of the revolutionary wars; in our country, those of Zsigmond Kemény date from the period following the defeat of the 1848 events, and those of Zsigmond Móricz from the counter-revolutionary period between the World Wars. What is the common thread between these writers, who from every point of view are so different? Namely, in the question of effective timeliness, both artistically and in terms of social timeliness.

Let us consider the latter question first. It is not the task of literature to give a concrete *answer* to the concrete questions of society and politics. At the same time, however, truly great, realist literature fulfills a powerful social vocation and makes it easier for society to discover the way to proper answers, in so far as it reveals the *human and social, spiritual and moral foundations of the new problems*. The great realists did this for their times: their apparent retreat into the immediate – or sometimes distant – past in fact served the goal of giving an answer to the question: *how did we arrive here?* What were the dominant human types, what were their problems, which led here? Namely: how did precisely this present emerge from precisely this past? And, even if the writer – such as Ibsen and Chekhov – refuses to respond explicitly, the poetically correct posing of the question holds implicitly in it the *direction* in which reply may and must be sought.

Of course the question can arise: if literature relates to the past in such an estranged and life-disregarding way as a notable part of today's Hungarian literature does, how can it depict the way that led from this past to the present? The doubt is justified, but not decisive. I would like to call attention to two points of view here. First, every sufficiently decent writer in the counter-revolutionary period lived through more than he was able to write, not only because of censorship, but also because of the inner rejection he harboured against the system, his withdrawal into himself. Secondly, we cannot

underestimate the experiences of the terrible years of 1944–5, the experiences of humiliation and of human dignity being crushed underfoot. These could lead – even if not directly, then through every sort of mediating instance – to a situation in which serious thinkers and significant writers might re-evaluate the whole past, emotionally and even with respect to the meaning of their own personal experience.

Here, of course, it would be necessary to break with the most cherished axiom of modern literary practice: the cult of immediate experience, which many writers – quite incorrectly – take to be the equivalent of being poetic. But, let us consider how did the great poets' apparently most subjective, most experience-based works come into being, their autobiographies? Goethe would have never written the story of the time of his childhood as he did, without his experience of the all-transformative great French Revolution; nor would have Gorky written about it as he did, if he had not lived through the upsurge and defeat of the 1905 Revolution. Here, their experiences gained that perspective, that disposition according to a world-view, that set the original 'immediate' childhood-experiences objectively in their proper place. If we, thus, speak here of the re-evaluation of the past as a great, timely task for writers, we are thinking, however, not of some alien, externally-imposed demand or some kind of theme forced upon writers from elsewhere, but, rather, that writers – genuine writers – should utilise historically-created circumstances to really discover themselves.

With this, we turn back to the first question, the *artistic* side of timeliness. We believe that our response should not surprise anyone: the literature appropriate to the new democracy is realism. Realism, of course, in the broad and deep sense according to which Shakespeare and Goethe, Balzac and Stendhal, Dickens and Tolstoy are true realists. If we demand this of literature, then that in no way implies party-politics. When Stalin, in 1934, turned to the writers in order to give social direction to their function, he did not say that they should support or attack this or that, but only: 'you should write the truth'.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Lukács may be referring to the first Writers' Congress in Moscow in 1934, in which the policy of socialist realism was fully unfurled both in the USSR and internationally. He may have in mind A.A. Zhdanov's explication of Stalin's notorious phrase about writers being the 'engineers of human souls', which he originally used in a toast to Maxim Gorky in 1932. In his speech to the Congress, 'Soviet Literature – The Richest in Ideas. The Most Advanced Literature', Zhdanov explained: 'Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of human souls. What does this mean? What duties does the title confer upon you? In the first place, it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as "objective reality", but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.' He goes on to add that it should also be ideologically edifying, in the spirit of socialism, and tendentious, as a class-literature engaged in class-struggle.

But, naturally, the *whole* truth, the truth penetrating to and comprehending the whole depth of the period. Photographic enlargement of the greater or smaller warts of the new democracy is not yet the truth.

The truth is always the totality, that is, the moving, developing totality, which brings into being crimes and achievements, upsurges and catastrophes. We know it is not always easy to look this truth in the face and express it without compromise. Especially not today; after the past undergone by the whole nation, it is especially difficult. The greatest danger of today's life is illusion with respect to the future, and along with this, the beautification of the past; excusing its mistakes, crimes, and faults, 'explaining' them in a manner in which they gradually, gradually become virtues. It is not our intention to turn, here, to the debates that circulate around these questions in present-day Hungarian society. We wish only to point out that literature, if it wants to remain literature, can tolerate many things, but not lies and self-deception. The writer who enters the swamp of prettifying, retouching, and falsifying, not only misleads his nation, but also ruins himself, precisely as a writer.

But it is also no easy task from the point of view of the individual artist to face the problem of the totality because, for almost everyone, it also implies self-criticism personally and as a writer, indeed this first and foremost. It is a matter of the lost 'citizen' in Hungarian life and in Hungarian literature. The writer was accustomed to look down on pushy, hedonistic selfishness. But the writer must also not forget that the self-satisfied cult of withdrawal into oneself and self-centred belief in one's own personality (isolation, despair) is hardly any better morally, nor is it literarily more productive.

How did the citizen get lost from the Hungarian person? How, as a consequence, did the Hungarian writer become an alien, inner emigrant in his own homeland? The relentless, honest posing of this question, a self-critical engagement setting out on this path, scatters the fog of lack of perspective, pessimism, decadence, and sterile subjectivism that has surrounded Hungarian literature for a very long time, and opens the writer's view towards the past and future. Here we are not pinning some alien-demands from outside

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Zhdanov 1935, p. 21. He may also refer to Stalin's comment in December 1933 to *The New York Times* reporter, Walter Duranty, credited with having coined the term Stalinism: 'You have done a good job in your reporting the USSR, though you are not a Marxist, because you try to tell the truth about our country...' – quoted in Taylor 1990, p. 192. In key-respects, the latter quote, rather than Zhdanov's, is more consonant with Lukács's Popular Front-influenced view; through realism's truth-telling function, progressive writers, including non-Marxists, serve the struggle against fascism and for people's democracy. (Of course, there is no little irony in the fact that Stalin was praising, as truth-telling, Duranty's denial of the devastating famine in the Ukraine unleashed by forced collectivisation.) I have not been able to locate a statement of Stalin corresponding exactly to that which Lukács attributes to him.

on the writer's breast. In the period of great disturbances in recent years, the best writers have deeply experienced this problem. In preference to my own words, I will allow Gyula Illyés to pose this question so much more perfectly in his moving lines:

The time is here for what we feared:  
there is no Hungarian.

Gloomily the old man asks: for what  
does the youth grow up?

For one can live life like a secret poacher,  
but where is the joy?

Living, growing, like a corpse's  
hair and nails?<sup>24</sup>

Gyula Illyés, as a truly significant poet, as a truly Hungarian-national poet, was deeply moved in the period of great crisis: where does it lead the nation, when its children cease to be genuine citizens, when all private matters, even individual life, stand above public concerns, the 'res publica'? Where does it lead the nation, when, for the people, the citizen's way of being changes into a distant, abstract horizon, which has completely disappeared from their immediate, everyday life and, thus, from literature as well? But Illyés has also movingly experienced where such a mode and feeling of life, such a world-view, leads the individual person and, along with that, the individual writer who gives him artistic expression. One cannot capture the prospectless parasitism of bare private life in a more moving and pitiless image than the one Illyés has created in this poem.

If thus, here, as a result of such conditions, a change is beginning in Hungarian literature, it is not at all necessary that this be a change compelled on literature from without. Nor would such a change be in any way in opposition to the truly great traditions of Hungarian literature. It is no more than a break with the tendencies in the century following the defeat of the 1848 Revolution, tendencies that are unhealthy, anti-social, and obstructive of literature's development. It is not necessary to refer here to Petőfi, Ady, Attila József. The pathos of citizenry connects the otherwise completely different Kölcsey and Berzsenyi; it establishes a bridge between Miklós Zrínyi and József Katona,<sup>25</sup>

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24. Lukács quotes from the second section of Gyula Illyés's unfinished poem entitled 'Magyarok, 1944', Illyés 1977f, p. 532.

25. Ferenc Kölcsey (1790–1838), poet, critic, and liberal political figure; Dániel Berzsenyi (1776–1836), one of the most significant Hungarian romantic poets, whose poetic work was derailed by a devastating review by Kölcsey; Miklós Zrínyi (1620–64), the 'poet-warlord', the most outstanding figure of the Zrínyi Hungarian and Croa-

and so on and so forth. If we expect a new, great realist literature from the writers of the new Hungarian democracy – what we really expect from them is an up-to-date renewal of the great Hungarian traditions.

The literature of democracy is, according to its nature, realism. 'Write the truth': this is the axiom of every democratic literature. Let the democratic regeneration of the Hungarian people be the regeneration of Hungarian literature as well. Let it also be the cultivation of a period of great realism, which has otherwise, until now, been missing from our so rich and multi-faceted literature.

January 1946

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tian noble family, which played a key role in the military defence of Christendom against Turkish incursions; József Katona (1791–1830), playwright and poet, author of *Bánk Bán*, about a medieval viceroy opposing foreign usurpers. Katona's play was understood as a protest against Habsburg domination of Hungary and was staged at the National Theatre on 15 March 1848, thus ceremonially marking the outbreak of the independence-insurrections.

## Chapter Five

# Literature and Democracy II

We have grown accustomed to the fact that democracy is spoken about in very general terms. In fact, it is usually discussed as if the form of democracy that took shape in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the classic mode, or, even, the only mode possible in which the democratic ideal could manifest itself. This interpretation is one of the fundamental ideological reasons that the political and social conditions of the Soviet Union are so often falsely evaluated. People only recognise the forms of life there as democratic to the degree to which they correspond to this other standard. This one-sided viewpoint very often confuses judgements about the new democracies as well. (Naturally, we are only now speaking of well-intentioned error; for most promulgators of these false views, precisely-defined class-interests dictate their ill-intentioned assertions.) Everywhere, this false standard leads people's judgements astray. The falsity of this standard, as we shall see, is manifest in the fact that in socialist democracies as well as in the new people's democracies, what is new and essential is how they diverge from the average development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century democracies.

### I

It is worth mentioning that at the outset of this development one of democracy's founding theoreticians, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, already posed the question



that will occupy us, here. That is, he posed it in terms of the opposition of direct and indirect democracy. Direct democracy was the democracy of the Athenian and Italian city-states and the Swiss cantons; indirect democracy was the parliamentary form of democratic society, such as it had taken shape in England. Rousseau's analysis, of course, seems to confirm the adherents of formal democracy. For, in his discussion, he emphasised the element of quantity and the size of states; for large states, he held direct democracy to be unfeasible.

Developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also seemingly confirm Rousseau's assertion. If we disregard the old democratic forms of the Swiss cantons, which were slowly dying out with the development of capitalism, and – especially – the decisive years of the great French Revolution, as well as the Paris Commune of 1871, indirect democracy ever more decisively pushed aside direct democracy. Even more absolute was the victory of indirect democracy in the liberal writing of history and in journalism. England's bourgeois historians called the truly great transformation, the Cromwellian revolution, which in its unfolding was full of elements of direct democracy, only the 'great rebellion', in contrast to the 1688 'Glorious Revolution', which was fully recognised by them. In the same way, for the bourgeois historians, the years 1792–4 of the French Revolution figure only as 'chaos', as disorder and anomaly; subsequent attempts to repeat them (1848, 1871) were suppressed at gunpoint precisely in the name of democracy.

This victory of indirect democracy, which seemed complete and definitive, was a Pyrrhic victory. For this complete victory and complete consolidation of indirect democracy at the same time, indicated the coming of the world-crisis of formal democracy. This crisis does not date from the present, but its acme, the temporary victory of fascist reaction, is one of the decisive contents in the events of our day. The cultural fate of today's life to a great extent depends on whether democracy succeeds and which democracies succeed, politically and socially, intellectually and morally, in definitively eliminating the remnants of fascism.

Already, this very question of 'what sort of democracy?' deeply offends the conservative, defensive guards of formal democracy. They do not realise – and many of them also do not want to realise – that precisely in this they evade the decisive question of eliminating fascism. They do not realise that one of the decisive preconditions of fascism's victory – both socially and ideologically – was precisely the crisis of democracy indicated above. On the one hand, this made it possible for a notable portion of the working people, workers and peasants, as well as the intelligentsia, to fall victim to fascist demagoguery; on the other hand, even the better part of those who resisted fascism – especially

those from the intelligentsia – were ideologically nearly defenceless in the face of it.

Put briefly, the causes of this crisis are to be sought in the fact that, in the developed capitalist states, democracy took such forms that it could put to use all of its achievements and hold precisely to its 'rules of the game' – and, yet, still, to get to the heart of the matter, could govern against the interests of the working people. All the constitutional criteria of formal democracy (the universal right to vote, equality before the law, freedom of assembly and of the press, and so on) did not prove guarantees against those tendencies that grew large on the terrain of developed capitalism, especially monopoly-capitalism and imperialism. Thus, the last period of the French Third Republic, which came to an ignoble end, was a period of the unbridled reign of a narrow monopoly capitalist ruling stratum, of the 'two hundred families'<sup>1</sup> – under the conditions of completely formal democracy. On the surface, formal democracy functioned uninterruptedly; however, in essence, a tiny anonymous clique reigned over 40 million people. Taken in its class-content, in the forms in which it manifests itself, and in its representative people, this reign could not have exerted any attraction for the working masses. The working masses themselves could not view this democracy as their own reign: thus, they could collapse under the first onslaught of fascism almost without resistance.

The basis of this development was, naturally, the class-structure of the Third Republic, the class-content of the formal democracy dominant in it. The greatest theoretical mind of the imperialist period, Lenin, gave this relation its classic summation and formulation in his *State and Revolution*. When, however, he expounds the character of bourgeois democracy as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and opposes it to the proletarian-democratic bases of the dictatorship of the proletariat, every attentive reader can see – although, in this work, Lenin does not focus his interest on the questions that we are discussing, which, for him, are only subsidiary questions – how formal democracy disengages the immediate manifestation of the people's will from any terrain of the life of the state. Vice versa, it is evident how many elements of direct democracy are taken up in Lenin's consideration of the proletarian state and socialist society.

This is not by chance. The opposed class-content affects the whole structure of the two systems and their every developmental trend. The more the principles of formal democracy and their practical applications stand in the

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1. According to Malcolm Anderson, the slogan of the 'two hundred families' dominating France was a popular political myth of the Left that arose in the 1930s and had a long afterlife; Lukács's reference to it bears the marks of this popular-front provenance. See Anderson 1965, pp. 163–78.

service of a narrow plutocratic stratum (or of the stratum of large capitalists mixed with the remnants of feudalism), the more the ruling stratum strives to disengage any mass-mobilisation, to render them institutionally impossible and put obstacles in their way ideologically. The large masses are used, through periodic elections, to lend a formal, democratic basis to an anti-popular content. Yet, such elections are orchestrated by a powerful capitalist apparatus; their intellectual direction (the press, radio, and so on) is in the hands of powerful capitalist interests. The masses, who do not agree with the system, may gain an organised voice only with great difficulty. Yet, completely direct, unorganised manifestations are punished by the legal system of formal democracy as excesses. This system is most clearly visible in the most developed country of monopoly-capitalism, the United States. Over and over, the situation arises that the millions-strong mass of the working people, sometimes even the majority of them, for some domestic or foreign political reason become discontented with the system. Of course, formally, nothing stands in the way of them manifesting their will in the elections. The 'only' thing necessary for this would be for a third party to come into being alongside the two ruling parties, which both equally serve the interests of the 'two hundred families', and concentrate these masses in itself. Yet, in so far as in America this 'only' means several hundred million dollars in cash, for the masses there remains only the ideological consolation that they have the formal right to form a party to protect their own interests. In truth, they can only decide for which party of the 'two hundred families' they will vote.

Ideologically, imperialist development tends to intensify the powerfully isolated, atomistic consciousness of the individual, which is itself the consequence of the economy of capitalism. Imperialist ideology strives towards a condition in which, always, only the individual person is opposed to the whole, which in content, structure, and function, is cast in obscurity and seemingly abstract. One of the primary efforts of imperialist, bourgeois ideology is that it should mentally and morally discredit everything that has even the most distant connection with the masses, anything to do with the life and movement of the masses. (Mass-psychology, aristocratic philosophy and sociology; different theories of élites, and so on. All these are very influential, especially upon the intelligentsia.) Contributing to this also is the capitalist division of labour, especially as it is understood by the imperialist bourgeoisie. In this conception, politics becomes a professional specialty in which 'non-specialists', 'outsiders' cannot and do not have any say; in this view, politics is precisely as much a 'matter for experts' as is electro-technics.

This social situation and such theories that spring from it alienate the masses from formal democracy. This alienation is especially in evidence in times of crisis. Weimar democracy was, from this point of view, a textbook-case of

formal democracy's estrangement from the life of the masses in the imperialist epoch. It was a democracy without democrats. No wonder that it collapsed without resistance at the first onslaught of fascism.

Yet this collapse was the climax of a political, ideological, and moral crisis that extended over some decades. Among the serious-thinking intelligentsia, formal democracy had long lost any really convinced adherents. Whoever still continued to defend this system on political grounds had long lost all enthusiasm and pathos from their arguments for it.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Max Weber's comportment most clearly expresses the standpoint of the academic advocates of formal democracy; he saw in it a purely pragmatic question, purely a matter of the 'lesser evil' in contrast with other modern systems. The other sign of the theoretical crisis is the continually widening and deepening romantic opposition to formal democracy, which steers backwards from the symptoms observed here and draws reactionary conclusions from them. This anti-democratic, romantic stance was primarily responsible for rendering a notable part of the intelligentsia theoretically and morally defenceless against fascist demagoguery. And even among such thinkers as those whose original aspirations were not backwards-looking, but, rather, directed forwards, towards mass-action and socialism, this romantic stance had reactionary consequences, and brought about the reactionary contamination of the original aspiration (for example, Georges Sorel).<sup>3</sup>

The so-called fascist theory of society is an exceptionally clever, demagogic use of this crisis.

## II

In this way, the crisis of formal democracy generates false opposition parties: on the one hand, those adhering to the old type of democracy, partially in bad faith (serving the interests of the 'two hundred families'), partially in a purely cold, pragmatic spirit; on the other hand, those in opposition to every sort of democracy and full of reactionary elements. This spurious dilemma is the reason why even that portion of the intelligentsia that is still acting in good faith incorrectly evaluates the proletarian democracy of

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2. The British novelist E.M. Forster captured this dampening of enthusiasm memorably in the witty title of his 1951 essay collection, *Two Cheers for Democracy*.

3. Georges Sorel, especially his syndicalist theory of the myth of the general strike expounded in *Reflections on Violence* (1908), significantly influenced Lukács's early ultra-left activism. Lukács was later far more critical of Sorel, seeing in his irrationalism an important source of error on the Left and a key component of fascist pseudo-revolutionary ideologies. For more on the ideological fungibility of Sorel's thought across the political spectrum, see Roth 1980, and Sternhell 1989.

the Soviet Union. It would be pure romanticism to insist that the foreign policy, planned economy, and so on of a state such as the Soviet Union should be deliberated and decided by the people in the same way that, for instance, the citizens of Athens advised and decided in their own people's assemblies. It is self-evident that the national economic plan can only be elaborated by a planning committee at the head of a large apparatus.

But those who in this way formalistically and romantically condemn proletarian democracy do not take into account the justification of this centralised work. They do not take into account that every individual factory, every individual collective farm deliberates and organises its own full set of questions in a manner inclined to a high degree of direct democracy; that this community – in the framework of the complete plan – gives a far-reaching autonomy to the collective of the factory or farm, with the goal that it arrange its own matters itself. Or, that the total plan, coming into existence centrally, to a great extent also comes into existence under the influence of these experiences, ideas, judgements, and suggestions that have emerged from these sites. And so on, in every domain of social life. One of the fundamental ideas of proletarian democracy is that politics is immediately the personal concern of every person's whole life. Every public issue, every economic and cultural issue in this sense is a political issue as well, in the sense that for every individual person, in every question, the point of departure is: *tua res agitur*, your concerns are at stake.

Rousseau was to this degree correct: that a state such as the Soviet Union can in no way be governable by direct democracy. Yet, completely mistaken is that – supposed – understanding of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries holding that such an assertion means the total, institutional disengagement of direct democracy. On the contrary: development moves, in parallel with the organisationally and socially informed raising of the political self-consciousness of the masses, towards a more decisive portion of state, social, and cultural life falling to the direct initiative, direct leadership, and direct oversight of the engaged masses.

Critics with a reactionary interest do not want to see these democratic aspects of Soviet development; nor for a long time – out of sectarian prejudice – have numerous revolutionary-spirited adherents of socialism been able to see them. Yet, one of the central questions for those of us who do not yet live in a socialist society and who do not view socialism as rapidly realisable (although we have never renounced the socialist perspective of development), is what we can learn from the Soviet Union's social organisation and culture.

The insight that there is a lot to learn here has advanced powerfully in recent years. Its motivating force was precisely the lesson of the struggle against fascism. The Spanish and Chinese wars of liberation, and, even more evidently,

the partisan mass-movement against Nazi Germany, took up, in analogous ways, these questions in their everyday practice. And, likewise, it stands at the focal point of the problems of Hungarian public life since the liberation.

To a certain degree, this signifies the revival of the heroic period of the great French Revolution. But, with changed content appropriate to changed times. Because, in the period of the great French Revolution, the social structure was still such that the entire heroic effort of the working masses could only serve to smash the feudal-absolutist framework and create the conditions for the development of capitalism. The manifestations of direct democracy in the mass-movements (the Jacobin clubs, the direct intervention of Parisian neighborhoods in the politics of the Convention, and so on) decisively influenced the progress of the French Revolution, making it possible that there – and only there – feudalism was completely shattered; yet the social goals of these mass-movements were still unrealisable and utopian in their economic content. Now, however, there exist all the economic and social preconditions and forces to allow the heroic struggle of the working people against fascism to achieve more serious results than ushering in the restoration of the formal-democratic system of the pre-war period. Now the preconditions exist for the people, who fought alone in these struggles and alone were victorious – who in 1830, in 1848, and so, too, 1918–19 fought alone for freedom – to maintain and strengthen their own rule, without this immediately taking a socialistic form.

This is the central question of the European situation of democracy today (put briefly: the question of creating a new type of people's democracy). The open and secret adherents of the fascist system resist any sort of democratic construction. In consequence, every adherent of democracy must unite against every remnant of fascism. Yet, in the entire world, it is apparent that only the serious adherents of a democracy founded on the masses, on 'direct' people's democracy, are the unyielding opponents of the remnants of fascism, which are everywhere organising anew. A significant part of the followers of the old formal democracy – ideologically, precisely in the name of democratic principles formally conceived – are very willing to give far-reaching freedom of manoeuvre to every superficially dolled-up fascist organisation. They interpret the freedom of the press and assembly, and so on. as fundamental democratic rights of fascism or semi-fascism to 'free expression of opinion'. Indeed, they see the endangerment of democracy precisely in the flourishing of the principles of people's democracy, in the permanent, uninterrupted, organised, and direct participation of the masses on every terrain of public life (the Greek and Spanish situations, and such like).

Anyone who looks at history only ideologically will be surprised at this. From the temporary victory of fascism, one cannot but learn precisely that

only the ceaseless activity, expansion, organisation, and education of popular energies can guard against open or disguised forms of fascist restoration. Yet, the crisis of the old, formal democracy was only on the surface an ideological crisis. Its real social underpinning was that democracy only had value and represented progress for the bourgeoisie, for the 'two hundred families' as long as, through the 'rules of the game', the working masses could, peacefully and without friction, be subordinated to the interests of a dwarfish minority.

The petrification and fetishisation of the principles of formal democracy and the canonisation of its forms are called upon to raise a new defensive barrier against genuine popular rule. If the unchecked dominance of the 'two hundred families' is at risk, then any means might be used as a barrier to popular power. Thus, forgiveness, 'Christian love' towards the remnants of fascism; and, thus, the 'democratic' defence of fascism's possibilities to express and organise itself. Because these remnants represent truly important reserve-forces for the 'two hundred families', in no way do they want them eliminated, or, even, want to let them be dispersed.

Here is the political and cultural significance of direct democracy, the radical restructuring of every manifestation of social life in the interest of genuine popular rule. This is the central, political and cultural question of the present day. And, in this question, too, for us, the democratic development of the Soviet Union is exemplary; we can learn a tremendous amount from it, and not just in the domain of politics, but also – what for us here is of foremost importance – of culture. Of course, this is true only when we see clearly which tendencies in the development of the Soviet Union show the general lines of people's democracy, which aspects are not fundamentally conditioned by the socialist transformation of society. Since, however, socialism is the highest form of democracy, in so far as we carefully consider differences, we can learn a tremendous amount from it for the benefit of popular democracy in all manifestations of social life. We must therefore not learn by imitation, since socialist democracy is not realisable on a different social basis; its copy would be a caricature. Rather, we must learn from socialist democracy in the way we can learn from an older, more developed relative: that is, taking over its lessons particularly, in ways appropriate to the specific conditions of Hungarian society; and, in a national sense, developing further that which responds to our own particular questions of Hungarian people's democracy.

### III

How does all this relate to our cultural and literary questions? We said: this crisis is not of recent origin, indeed it is quite old; it was visible in culture



and literature much earlier than in the directly political domain. For capitalist development, the blanching and abstraction of public life resulting from formal democracy, the artificial, but socially-necessary, separation of the public and private person, at the same time brings about the impoverishment of literature and the degeneration of its great forms.

Already, 150 years ago, Friedrich Schiller saw this problem quite clearly. About tragedy, he wrote: 'The activity and fate of heroes and kings are already in themselves public, and were in simple archaic times all the more so... The king's palace is now closed. The administration of justice has withdrawn from the gates of the cities to the interior of houses. Writing has repressed the living word, and the people themselves, the sensuously vital mass, where it does not act as crude violence, has become a state, consequently some kind of abstract concept. The gods have retreated to the human bosom. It became the task of the poet to again throw open the palaces, to conduct the administration again under the open sky, to establish again the gods, to create anew every immediacy that was suspended by the artificial arrangement of real life...'<sup>4</sup>

It is evident that Schiller clearly saw the basic issue: from modern life the publicness of antiquity disappears (which, as we have seen, stands in the closest relation to direct democracy), and with this, not only does one irreplaceable, unsubstitutable domain of life get submerged, but, rather, the whole of life, in all its manifestations, is suppressed and impoverished. And Schiller also saw that there was only one exception to this in modern life: the revolutionary moment. The people, according to him, only then are a 'sensuously vital mass', if it 'acts as a crude force'.

The decisive shortcoming of Schiller's excellent observations is the illusion that what life and social development has destroyed, the poet – in his works – could restore. Of course, this is a heroic illusion, which we can thank for several great works of the nineteenth century. Yet, it is, thus, only an illusion, because the poet's work can expose the wounds and sicknesses of life; can intone in captivating elegies his pain at the distortion and disfiguration of life; can announce with impatient pathos the necessity of the cure; can, indeed, with prophetic foresight, demonstrate into what sort of whirlpool the mechanism of real social forces sweeps humanity – yet that which does not exist from social necessity cannot be conjured into existence by any sort of poetry.

Here, the degradation of the person is at stake. For literature, the person is foremost and everything. Social relations and the structure and development

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4. Schiller 2004, pp. 819–20.



of society are only depictable in true literature through the person: what does all this make of the person? What types of person does it develop to greatness? What sorts of human capacities does it distort or suppress?

It is a commonplace that man is a social being. Even in our ultimate isolation, in our most interior and lonely monologues, we are always members of a determinate society, at a certain level of development. Our active and passive, our internal and external life – whether consciously or not – are in the same way inseparable from the web of social interactions. But if we are not aware of this relation, or if we do not wish to take notice of it, then our so-called external destiny, that is, our economic, political, and social destiny appears, in our creations, to be stripped of every human element. Then we do not experience and imagine this destiny as being our social interactions with other people, but, rather, in our self-consciousness, we fetishistically transform it into external objects and lifeless things. Instead of the concrete economy of life, the colourful web of our interactions, an abstract, impoverished, oppressed 'I' stands opposed to an external world that has become an abstract, fetishised, dead thing.

Schiller called literature into heroic struggle – though, from the outset, doomed to futility – against this situation. In the course of subsequent development, especially during the imperialist period, even this struggle in literature came to a halt, or, at least, was seen only sporadically among individual, isolated writers of significance. The greater part of literature simply took notice of this mutilation of the person, the fact that he only lived as a human life his own most inner life, that only the inner life was illuminated by self-consciousness and self-recognition and with the light of imagination. At most, he experienced some completely private references of a lonely ego, thrown back on itself, to other egos, equally lonely and equally thrown back upon themselves. Indeed, this continues up to the point that the very literature which views itself as the sole artistically-progressive tendency seeks exclusively here the domain of literary representation, the domain in which it becomes aware of itself. It seeks enlightenment exclusively in inwardness, in the revelation of subconscious strata of the ego, in research into archaic, elementary instincts, putatively timeless and subsisting apart from history and society.

Thus, the exterior world, especially society, and still more so the political world, disappears almost completely from literature. It was no longer even the empty and dead, if decorative stage-setting that it was in the time of transition, as in Zola. The lonely ego, racing into chaos and the void, staring off into space, tottering on the edge of non-being, became the almost exclusive object of 'avant-garde' literature, whose style quite adequately followed from the fact that – as one German thinker correctly and wittily put it – the writer could

not find his place in the world anywhere and in any way. (The problematic situation that comes into existence in this manner thoroughly permeates the most recent Hungarian literature as well; but it is worth recalling that in the young generation counter-tendencies have also appeared: Gábor Halász, already years ago, indicated – interestingly, precisely from a purely artistic standpoint – that literature arrives, here, at a dead end.)

It is strange but true that this literature was dominant both when the old type of democratic society still stood firmly and when the various strains of fascism put human thought in chains. The latter phenomenon is not hard to understand. Fascism sought to destroy completely any public life. That which it trumpets with demagogic lies as its spurious ‘community’ is so deeply poisoned by its radically-corrupt ‘world-view’ that one can fully understand how serious and honourable writers would withdraw to the most mysterious depths of selfhood, so as not to have to hear this raucous noise and smell this reek of decay.

But it is odd – and more thought-provoking – that this flight, this submerging of public life, its destruction, this feeling that the depiction of public life is not even worthwhile should become the dominant literary tendency in formal democracy as well. Why? We believe it is because such a degradation of public life – from causes enumerated at the outset of this discussion – also exists in formal democracy. The individual person does not find here either such life-forms in social and public life that he can feel – precisely as an individual – to be essential; for the individual, public life manifests itself, here too, as some dead, bare, thing-like relation opposed to him. Thus, if he wants to experience, make self-conscious, and depict something rooted, essential, and human, then, for him, the way leads only inward, into the depths of the enclosing ego. For a later historian, it will undoubtedly be interesting to establish the relation between the Chamberlain-Daladier period of formal, democratic politics and its social system with the period’s ego-centred ‘avant-garde’ literature.

To repeat: this tendency to turn inwards is fully understandable. But, the more we understand it, the more clearly will we see that literature is not capable of substituting or setting right the objective shortcomings of life with creative forms. Literary works, in their contents and forms, are always true or distorted reflections of real life, social existence, and the forms of human community – even if the creative method of writers appears consciously to contradict this principle.

In this case, they reflect today’s peculiar degeneration and impoverishment of human existence, human fulfilment, and the human being called to many-sided development. Since as in the ideological development of the previous century, the ideal of the total human being received its clearest expression

in the idea of antiquity, perhaps we can illustrate most briefly and precisely this process if we look at the modern development of this ideal. At that time, Winckelmann deeply and correctly recognised that the harmony and perfection of Greek man (and consequentially, Greek tragedy and Greek sculpture) has the closest relation to the form of Greek freedom: the direct democracy of free men. And it is interesting that after the great French Revolution, to the degree that this relation as an immediate ideal and as a principle to be realised was lost, the Greek ideal also degenerated in the aesthetic approach. Without its connectedness to freedom and direct democracy, it became impoverished to empty academicism; later, in the course of the imperialist age, it adapts to the hysterical subjectivism and relativism of modern-individualist life and to the mystique of primal instincts.

#### IV

It becomes clear only now, how, and to what extent, the transformation of social existence that we customarily designate with the expressions 'new democracy' or 'people's democracy' is a cultural problem, as well as an essential issue of literature. Often, we have spoken about how enormously significant that change will be for the whole culture and, in it, for literature; what a change it will be that culture ceases to be the exclusive privilege of a tiny stratum, in large part parasitic, and cut off from the real life of society. Yet, the change that will occur here is much more than the – in itself important – quantitative expansion, i.e. that literature's reading public grows immeasurably, and that literature can draw its own new talents from an inexhaustible popular reservoir. Over and above these quantitative changes, it is also a matter of inner, structural transformations, deeply affecting content and form alike. People's democracy everywhere consciously cultivates the permanent, organic, and organised participation of the masses in every domain of social existence that touches upon the life-interests of the masses. Thus – within those limits authoritatively established by a continuity of modern state administration of greater or lesser extent – people's democracy cultivates anew to a maximum degree direct democracy as a practical principle of life.

This transformation, in turn, implies the emergence of a new human type to be contrasted with the dominant type of the present and recent past. A new human type emerges as a result of the new, popular, democratic forms of life, because the domain of viewpoint, experience, thought, and so on, of the people participating in them qualitatively changes. This qualitative change occurs in so far as the *individual* life of the person thus organically encompasses

in itself *public* life as well, and in so far as the distortion that past periods have occasioned in him (fascist reaction and formal democracy – in different ways – but equally so) is abolished. The new life that is giving rise to the new person reshapes both the masses of readers and the writers. The masses, in so far as this new life makes them aware of their power and authority, leads them to recognise their genuine interests, and shows them the possible harmony of their interests with the great epochal interests of the nation and even, indeed, of humanity. The writers, in so far as it makes them capable of giving voice not merely to their own individual, narrow, subjective sentiments. This new life makes them see and hear all that most deeply and authentically moves the people, the nation, and humanity.

The new life under people's democracy produces this transformation. Of course, not all of a sudden, and not conjured out of nothing. Already, for a long time, the desire for this new life has lived both in the masses and in the best writers as well; it was alive during the darkest years of counter-revolution. Already, back then, Attila József clearly formulated the central principles of a new poetry, pointing beyond modern subjectivism, when he programmatically wrote as the title of one of his volumes: 'I Don't Cry Out'.<sup>5</sup> And in this poem he clearly expressed the human and poetic meaning of this claim:

With fresh showers seep into the ground –  
In vain you bathe within yourself,  
Only in others may you wash your face.

Among the poets of the counter-revolutionary period, Attila József stood out not only with his genius, but also with his clear-sightedness, his clear-minded judgement of the present and future. It is all the more significant that we encounter such moods not only in his poetry, though his poetry exhibits them in their purest form. Even such a sensitive poet as Miklós Radnóti, who recoiled from action and decision, also clearly saw this problem, albeit in his poetry it received voice not in the form of militant declaration but, rather, as elegiac resignation:

Must I too be mute? what spurs me  
today to verse, tell me! death? – who asks?  
  
who seeks from you a reckoning of your life,  
and of this poetry here, that it has remained in fragments?  
Then know this! Not even one lament will sound,  
nor will anyone bury you, nor valley rock you,

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5. Attila József, *Nem én kiáltok* (1925).

the wind will scatter you, and the cliff's edge,  
 if not today, then tomorrow, will echo back in song  
 what I say to it, and sons and daughters  
 growing up, will understand.<sup>6</sup>

And, in one of Gyula Illyés's most beautiful war-poems, he clearly expressed how completely inadequate was the whole old, equivocal form of living and feeling, never and nowhere going all the way, for the salvation and preservation of the national community:

It wasn't enough, it wasn't enough  
 neither loyalty, nor tenacity,  
 from which to unite a country  
 and make a generation a nation.

...Because neither force, nor wisdom  
 can suffice to save  
 the house in which its builders  
 cannot feel at home.<sup>7</sup>

Only from this negative situation, from recognising and experiencing the inadequacy of this existing life, can something new, a positive situation, be born. The more deeply and more manifoldly the poets experienced this inadequacy, the deeper they felt and knew that the constraint of Hungarian political and social life that condemned the working masses to misery and repression, was the concern of everyone's life, every individual's life, and constrained the flourishing of the poet's human and poetic capacities as well. In other words: the more clearly he knew and the more intensively he felt that the democratic transformation was also the liberation of the whole person – precisely because it was first and foremost a truly radical economic, social, and political transformation – the more purely he could give voice to the new forms and feelings of life that were now in birth. Again, we refer to Gyula Illyés, who in the poem he wrote for the jubilee of the National Peasants' Party speaks thus of his party and of the individual's relation to the party:

It is our parent and also our child,  
 our bitterness and comfort,  
 it carries us forward  
 and meanwhile we must bear it too:

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6. Miklós Rádnoti, 'Nyugtalan Órán [In a Sleepless Hour]', 1939.

7. Gyula Illyés, 'Nem volt elég [It wasn't enough]', 1946.

it is the purpose, which if we understand,  
 it makes us understand why we live,  
 even if we die for it!<sup>8</sup>

Today, it is no longer merely impatient, utopian demands at stake; the theoretical and poetic call for a new man is no longer just a message cried out in the wilderness. The new communal feeling can make the individual a complete person, because in the final instance – of course, only in the final instance, which does not exclude individual conflicts nor, indeed, even tragedies – now the path to fulfilment of individual and society, individual and nation already points in a single direction. Today, this is still only an aim and a tendency. It is the object of our struggle rather than the concretely tangible, existing reality of our lives. Yet, it is, thus, already the fact of a new life and not merely a moral demand or social utopia. Because the path to the new man is also inseparably the path of people's democracy. In this struggle, the new man is born, and with him, the new literature, from the sufferings and joys, the self-knowledge, will, and sacrifice of the best living today. Dialectical materialism teaches that man originally has produced himself through labour; through his own work he has made himself human. Only the activity of the masses, the activity of men, can produce the new forms of people's democracy. And if these forms assist in the birth of a new, no longer mutilated human being, then, too, this human being will also have produced himself.

June 1946

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8. Gyula Illyés, 'Teremtmény [Creature]', 1946.

## Chapter Six

### **Populist Writers in the Balance**

It is unavoidable that in the course of the discussion to follow, the perspectives of politics, world-view, and literature cross one another time and again. Here, this is not simply the natural method of the Marxist conception of literature; it also derives from the essence of the object. For it is precisely characteristic of the populist movement – as József Darvas wrote not long ago in a retrospective series of articles – that it developed into a political movement and political party out of a literary movement. And, on the other hand, it is likewise characteristic of this present-day party-movement that it is connected with literature more closely than others, that today, as well, it much more easily and quickly passes from politics into literature and back than other political formations. Our method here, thus, derives organically from the character of the object itself.

#### **I**

In a conversation with Gorky, Lenin said of Tolstoy: 'Before this count, there were no peasants in our literature'. This declaration does not mean, of course, that, in Lenin's view, before Tolstoy there were no excellent depictions of peasant-life and the peasant-soul in Russian literature. Lenin here wants to say that, in Tolstoy's work, for the first time, the peasant appears in Russian literature as seen through peasant-eyes, as depicted from the viewpoint of the peasant-conception of life – that is, the peasant not as

the object of the literary composition – even if perhaps the object of an excellent realism – but, rather, as its subject.

With the necessary specification, this statement of Lenin can be a very appropriate starting point for taking a just measure of the Hungarian populist-literary movement. Elsewhere, Lenin called Tolstoy the mirror of the Russian peasant-movements, of their motivations and discontents. Seen thus, he added, Tolstoy's world-view and his mode of depiction reflect the development of the peasantry both in its achievements and in its weaknesses. This viewpoint can be applied without hesitation to the Hungarian-populist literary movement as well. It is not a matter, here, of high-minded, abstract, rationalist criticism. All great historical movements, all awakenings of classes and peoples have their weaknesses, which belong to them with organic necessity. If a sleeping giant should happen to stretch his limbs in the midst of his dream or at the moment of awakening in an awkward fashion, purely aesthetic criticism would be superficial and tasteless.

At the same time, however, the idealisation of the weaknesses of any movement always has a harmful influence on the movement's development. It is dangerous from a political, cultural, and literary point of view alike. The criticism that we Marxists make of the populist movement already has its own tradition. We recognise the historical roots and necessity of the weaknesses, yet our establishment of the facts is tied to the attempt to clarify that which is in need of clarification, correcting mistakes and carrying forward those who are wavering. The populist writers themselves acknowledge the existence and justification of this tradition. A few years ago, for example, Péter Veres emphasised the special place of the Marxists among those tendencies that criticised the populists: 'Genuine Marxist Socialists, however, stand apart. They do not so much fight against us, as they are unsatisfied with us; they demand that we take sides more radically and more consistently with the movement of the working classes in actual class-struggle.... I admit that for me and for some others only the opinion of this group matters'.<sup>1</sup>

The populist writers' movement is a powerful broadening of Hungarian literature, but – although it represents a decisive step in the direction of renewing Hungarian literature – it is only a step forward and not a fulfilment: it did not bring to an end the division in Hungarian literature that has been in effect since 1867. Indeed, temporarily it has even deepened this division, in so far as it manifests the opposition of urban and village- (now peasant-) literatures differently, more sharply, and more passionately than before. The main reason for this division had been the uncomprehending impatience of

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1. Veres 1945, pp. 178–9.



urban literature (the 'urbanist' group) with the weakness and mistakes of the populist writers – although, often enough, even with their accomplishments. Also playing an important role, however, was the incapacity of the populist writers, in their main lines of development, to achieve a universal national character, transcending this division, such as was represented by Ady before World War I or by Attila József between the Wars. Their best works strove in this direction and often approached this quality, but one could also say: solely, retrospectively, only in their *literary-historical* significance did they achieve this. The populist movement itself – because of the weaknesses already mentioned – time after time deepened the split between progressive-urban literature and the peasant-literature of the village, in so far as it presented plausible reasons to sharpen this opposition.<sup>2</sup>

Despite all this, the populist movement was the most significant literary event of the quarter-century of the counter-revolutionary period. It lent a new physiognomy to the development of Hungarian literature.

## II

At the outset of the populist writers' movement was Dezső Szabó. It would be a scholastic question to ask: to what extent is Dezső Szabó a truly populist writer? In the strict sense, unquestionably, he was not. Because the actual movement itself was a product of disillusionment with the revolutions and counter-revolution, whereas Dezső Szabó, like Zsigmond Móricz, who, in all other respects, is profoundly different, derives from the pre-war period, from the literary revolution of *Nyugat*. In fact, in his artistic tendency, Móricz stands incomparably closer to populist literature than does Dezső Szabó. Therefore, there could be such a strong and productive reciprocal relation between Móricz and the populists. The final period of Móricz's work unquestionably converges with the populist movement (Sándor Rózsa).<sup>3</sup> The literary situation of Dezső Szabó is totally different. His artistic mode of expression, which stands very close to the expressionism of the years before World War I and after, his abstract depiction of figures, his passionate rhetoric are all diametrically opposed to the main tendencies of populist literature. This artistic

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2. Lukács refers to the ideological and practical divisions between one sector of Hungary's interwar intellectuals, termed 'urbanists', who were relatively progressive and urban, but cut off from the potentially-revolutionary aspirations of the peasantry, and another group, the 'populists', who were genuinely plebeian, radical, and rooted in the villages, but also susceptible to irrationalism, anti-Semitism, and manipulation in fascist directions.

3. A main character in Móricz's late trilogy of historical novels, *Transylvania*.

disposition – and the social and philosophical dispositions that determine it – is the reason why the upsurge of the populist movement did not inspire him in literary terms. In contrast to Zsigmond Móricz, he remained a lonely eccentric, even then. And yet, there is hardly another writer who had as deep an influence on the development of populist literature – especially ideologically – than he. He was influential both for better and for worse, but, indeed, often enough for worse.

For this reason, therefore, we must touch upon this relation briefly at the outset. This is especially necessary because Szabó's work reveals with unusual clarity a fundamental issue that, in our later discussion, becomes increasingly visible: how problematic it is for the thought and emotional world of the new intelligentsia, itself partially originating in the peasantry, to reflect the peasant's fate. This unusual clarity in Szabó's case lies in the fact that his connection to the peasantry is much more abstract, so much more sheer desire and dream, so much exclusively demand and resolve, than is true for later writers who actually originate – at least in part – from the peasantry itself.

'A sorrowful, down-at-heels gentleman, mourning for the people', Endre Ady called himself.<sup>4</sup> Not only because of his higher and more comprehensive universality, but also because Ady was a lyric poet, this problematic status took a purer form with him. The lyric allows, indeed demands, that precisely these highly problematic situations, feelings, and thoughts should come to expression in their full intensity and one-sidedness. If they are subjectively honest, if they expose the problematic situation with complete integrity, if they seriously give voice to the spiritual doubts and even perhaps complete bewilderment springing from this situation – then, as lyric, such expressions fulfil their calling and may be artistically perfect. If, however, some conflict thus generated is deepened to tragedy or broadened to epic, then, no matter how honestly experienced, the inner, subjective dialectic of the situation does not suffice. It becomes necessary, artistically, to generalise the objective motive forces of the conflict, to transpose them properly into human actions and passions, and to recognise in a poetically-appropriate way the essence of social reality and the essential pathways of its evolution. In so far as during the entire period of the development of populist literature this problematic situation existed between the reflected reality and the reflecting poetic subjectivity; in so far as populist literature was continually compelled to pose the question whose voice spoke in it, whether in fact the suffering of the peasantry spoke

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4. The line is from Ady's poem, 'Dózsa György unokája [György Dozsa's Grandson]', in Ady 2004, p. 204. In this signature-poem, Ady, of noble descent but from an impoverished family and radicalised into intransigent opposition to the conservative society of pre-World War I Hungary, identifies himself with the martyred leader of a sixteenth-century Transylvanian peasant-uprising.

through it or just some narrow poetic subjectivity – it is not by chance that the most honest, deepest, and least artistically problematic manifestations of this literature took such lyric form. Here, of course, one would have to refer to Gyula Illyés. A few of his poems at once illuminate both the artistic and the social aspects of the question.

We have before us the description of a boat-trip. The poet sees the inhuman working conditions of the stokers: 'They are used to it, someone beside me casually says'. Here the conflict taken up by the poem begins. The poet is not calmed by the quiet, by the beauty of nature, by the consolation he repeats to himself. The image of his father arises before him, and he cannot shake himself free of it:

– You fool – I hissed within myself.  
 – Traitor! That's what you are, nothing else!  
 resounds in my heart another voice  
 and groaning continually spelled this out.  
 – Traitor! Lie! You wretch!  
 Low-life lackey!... – If again  
 you went below, with the stokers:  
 would you get used to this choking, this torment?...  
 I looked in a fluster at the water,  
 at the fleeting landscape, as if it weren't  
 the boat that was running with me but  
 rather the rush of history.  
 As if raging at me, sickening me  
 it would brandish pitilessly at me,  
 word by word: you can't forget,  
 you can't escape – wherever you go!<sup>5</sup>

Or, in another poem: he realises that his accent and words are entirely those of his father. The question 'Who speaks?' confronts him:

...I have my place, my words in many places.  
 In a tuxedo, leaning on the marble fireplace  
 I debate. Suddenly:  
 what would he say now to my words  
 – it hits me – and what would this refined circle say  
 if once they heard his words,  
 words of the old farmhand?<sup>6</sup>

5. Illyés 1977a, pp. 278–9.

6. Gyula Illyés, 'Ki szól? [Who speaks?]', Illyés 1977d, p. 362. The poem is addressed 'to the village-researchers', the sociographers who documented peasant- and village-

Both beautiful poems are perfect expositions of the outer and inner situation, and as such, they do not even require a response. Only the *entire* populist movement *wanted* to respond; or rather, every one of its epic and dramatic products should have given a response. But, however much the populist writers sense this problematic situation, that it is not self-evident that the ideologist of the class would express neither himself, nor his subjective desires, nor the inner issues of the isolated intellectual, but would, rather, strive to give voice to the people and the peasantry – even in their very best works usually they only managed to pose the question (the lyrical situation). In most of the cases, they represent only *that* the people's voice speaks at all; *what* it says has not really been expressed so far. The autobiographical parts of 'People of the Plains' and 'Hungarians'<sup>7</sup> show this, as does Darvas's play 'Abyss'.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, the strength and weakness of Dezső Szabó reveals itself in the fact that – for his part – he did not even see a problem here. This became a powerful source giving formal impulse to his works; yet, to this corresponded, ultimately, the abstractness and poverty of their content. Thus his János Bőjthe (*The Village Swept Away*) says: 'Sometimes I feel that I am the backbone and muscle of the village, and that all I have to do is stretch myself out good and long, and there will be no hungry land, no downtrodden family, and no sickly body. Their life is my own moral'. Of course, if we look at Szabó's actual novelistic depiction and not this image of his desire, we see hardly anything of this pathos-ridden claim to unity. Maybe where the novel ends, at the marriage with the peasant-girl – however, even this remains completely abstract, as lyrical desire forced to become reality and programme. The hero says at the novel's end, when he speaks about the marriage: 'I build myself into the peasant, as though into an impregnable castle. For Hungarianness is in the peasant, he is its sole refuge, its only future'.

Nevertheless, the very fact that Dezső Szabó sees the sole solution in this, is a historical deed in the development of Hungarian literature; in fact, it even points beyond literature. Ady's poetry signified the rejection of the 1867 Compromise.<sup>9</sup> It also exploded the narrowly circumscribed framework of that

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life in the 1930s, lending an important impetus to the *Népies* (populist) cultural and political moment with which Illyés was associated and which Lukács critically discusses in this essay.

7. Gyula Illyés, *Puszták népe* [People of the Plains], (1936), a work mixing sociography and autobiographical memoir, and *Magyarok* (1938), Illyés's diaries of the 1930s. The latter work was critically reviewed by Lukács in his essay 'Az írástudók fellössége' (Lukács 1945b).

8. József Darvas, *Szakadék* (1942).

9. The 1867 Compromise formed the 'dual' Austro-Hungarian monarchy following the failure of the independence-struggles of 1848–9 within the Habsburg empire.

reform activity towards which the literary revolution of *Nyugat* was striving: the struggle to legitimate bourgeois-urban literature *alongside* the literature of the official gentry and their followers. Ady was the albatross presaging the coming revolutionary storm. Dezső Szabó already represented a narrowing and warping of the problem. He cast a sharp light on those factors that rendered the 1918–19 Revolution rootless in the Hungarian populace and, thus, led in the ultimate instance to its collapse. Above all, he underscored the neglect of the peasantry and the failure to recognise their genuine demands. Secondly, though not just secondarily, he pointed to the position taken by the intelligentsia towards the problematic nature of Hungarian reality.

Dezső Szabó recognised that there was no true Hungarian bourgeoisie. He recognised that this resulted from the 1867 Compromise. He recognised that the official Hungarian culture that grew up on the terrain of this Compromise was neither a culture, nor Hungarian, nor national. This recognition set him in opposition to every dominant tendency, from Tisza through the Revolution up to Bethlen and Gömbös. This was the point of departure for his opposition to the post-1867 Hungarian literature, right-wing and left-wing alike. In this respect, it is Szabó's genuine merit that, on either side, he relentlessly criticised the 'great industrial' literature that served the ruling class: both Ferenc Molnár and Ferenc Herczeg.

But this struggle narrowed with him as well. Ady was, indeed, the 'grandchild of György Dózsa',<sup>10</sup> in solidarity with *every* revolutionary, progressive, renewing tendency. Dezső Szabó, although he perceived the necessity of social renewal, also contracted this struggle into a truly muddled issue of racial renewal for the Hungarians. For him, in the first instance, it was not a matter of liberating the working people of Hungary from the yoke of feudalism and large-scale capital, but, rather, the Hungarians' war of independence from the Jews, the Slavs, and the Germans. Thus, with him, Ady's radical, democratic, and revolutionary line becomes shrunken and twisted. This is why Szabó claims that Ady's union with all the progressive forces was a union with the Jews, a union that he, Szabó, renounced.

This narrowing and distortion has its own social roots: the sickly aspects of Hungarian development, which did not allow a new intelligentsia, capable of developing Hungarian culture further, to arise from the working class and peasantry. But, by confusing the effect with the cause, by fighting mainly against the effect, not only did Dezső Szabó become politically – temporarily – aligned with the counter-revolution; he also produced an ideology that, despite its

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10. Lukács alludes again to Ady's 1907 poem, 'Dózsa György unokája [Grandson of György Dózsa]'. See note 4 above.

peasant-objectives, was, through its deepest roots, connected to European decadence, and which, therefore, against his intention, was continuously in contact with the reactionary world-views of the time.

Dezső Szabó's restricted posing of the question thus carried him into proximity with, and put him under the deep influence of, the ideology of the 'historical classes', even with the collapsing ideology of the capitalist bourgeoisie. The experiences of recent decades have proven in countless cases that neither a true experience of the contradictions of capitalist culture, nor burning hatred of the inhuman aspects of capitalist culture, indeed, not even the most pertinent criticism of its individual features can save a thinker from reactionary tendencies, if, at the same time along with the negative, critical insights, he does not see the consequent path of progressive, democratic liberation from it. Just as romantic anticapitalists like Georges Sorel<sup>11</sup> were misled, so, too, the romantic anticapitalist Dezső Szabó.

The precondition of a correct diagnosis of social reality is, above all, cognisance about objective reality as well as respect for this reality. Dezső Szabó denied objective knowledge in principle. In his eyes, as was the case for European decadence in its entirety, history was pure subjectivity, 'lyric': 'it is historical necessity that we transform the lyric of history writing from the lyric of the values of the class of foreign exploiters into the lyric of the deepest life-values of the great masses of Hungarians'. Thus, it is not that he set the truth in opposition to lies and the falsification of history; rather, he pitted one lyricism against another.

The further precondition of the correct diagnosis of society is proper insight into the path to humanity's liberation and progress. It is undeniable that, in recent decades, both in Hungary and abroad, progress has been conceived in a stale and apologetic fashion. Criticism of this conception of progress is important, useful, and purposeful. Yet, Dezső Szabó, here also, does not oppose a new truth to obsolete lies, nor the newly revealed depths of truth to dull superficiality, but, rather, the putatively superior lyric of pessimism to the inferior lyric of optimism, the lyric of irrationalism to the lyric of dull rationalism. 'We see that in the face of death's vigilance, in the inhuman storm of cosmic forces, in the irrational whirling of human masses, action and passion, kiss and deceit, hatred and defence are madness. Every will is madness, and the whole human will itself; every goal is madness, the goal of humanity itself'.

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11. Georges Sorel (1847–1922), revolutionary-syndicalist theorist, most well-known for his 1908 book *Réflexions sur la violence*. Sorel played an important role in Lukács's early thought, as well as in other activist socialists such as Antonio Gramsci; in his irrationalist theories of myth and action, he also influenced fascist theory and practice.

It is a necessary consequence of this position that Dezső Szabó's romantic-anticapitalist view of society flows into the currents of reactionary world-tendencies. The great German-hating Dezső Szabó, who, for years, waged battle against German influence, almost conforms word-for-word to the standpoint of the 'world-outlook' of German fascism: 'My view of the world, in its every root, in its whole essence, is tragic. Pessimistic: but this pessimism is cheerful and heroic'. Heroic pessimism is how Bäumler and Rosenberg labelled Hitler's 'world-outlook' as well.

This disposition and world-outlook subsequently imposed on Dezső Szabó his whole ensemble of incorrect perspectives. Here, I will only recall one: that he saw in German and Italian fascism the true continuation of the French Revolution, and, in this way, unintentionally gave aid to fascism's pseudo-revolutionary social demagoguery.

### III

These questions needed to be set so clearly in the foreground because, precisely along this line, Dezső Szabó's influence has been, unfortunately, quite significant and has had great resonance for some of the leading ideologues of populist literature. In the first instance, we need to speak about László Németh, who, on a great number of points, corresponds to the sorts of dangerous and reactionary conceptions put forward by Dezső Szabó. Thus, László Németh – just like Dezső Szabó – participates in the modern thinkers' polemics against progress. 'In the idea of progress there was just as much cluelessness as self-confidence....Frobenius's idea that the culture of primitive people is in many respects a more genuine culture than ours would have been chalked up as nonsense....According to the theory of progress, one generation piles its works atop the work of other generations, so that the 'spiritual pyramid' will grow ever higher. They do not see that life does not build pyramids. In life, the first act is always the decisive one. The fate of cultures is set out by the first period that produces their characteristic features....Linear progress is linear cooling-down. The new spirit does not recognise progress'.<sup>12</sup> Here, it is clearly evident that László Németh, polemicalising against a vulgarly one-sided conception of progress, falls under the influence of reactionary and decadent, bourgeois anti-progressive tendencies. So much so that, here, he expounds a theory of history that, in its decisive points, is substantially in agreement with that of Rosenberg.

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12. Németh 1935.



In the same way as for Dezső Szabó, the rejection of progress evokes a hopelessly pessimistic mood and conception of life for László Németh. In the *Debrecen Catechism*, he writes: 'Is our struggle hopeless? Greatness, just like life itself, is hopeless; and in the hopelessness, in the struggle of people stood up against the wall, there is a hope that rises above two-times-two. History is the miracle of the tragic feeling of life. At Marathon, hopelessness was victorious'.<sup>13</sup> We have no room here to waste on rejecting the philosophical and historical errors of these theories. We recall them here only to point out their ideological implications. I would only like to call attention to how close a relation there is between László Németh's decadent pessimism and his acceptance, to a certain degree, of race-theory: 'Race is the ultimate parapet of despair, the last wall before which the warriors, condemned to be cut down, must make their stand. Race is concentration against death'.

Yet, even more importantly, out of all this follows the deeply hopeless, perspectiveless synopsis of Hungarian development as a whole. At the Szárszó conference, István Nagy correctly said that László Németh's speech produced a 'mood of death': 'This is nothing less than a call for *national suicide*'.<sup>14</sup> This is not by chance. For, as long as one dates the beginning of the decline of Hungarian culture – however confusingly this may happen in individual instances – from the failure of the 1848 Revolution or from the 1867 Compromise, then the analysis itself lent its perspective towards a new upsurge. László Németh's 'deep Hungarian/shallow Hungarian' theory is not only profoundly wrong, but also lacking perspective from the point of view of national renewal; indeed, it even actively destroys such a perspective. Because if, as László Németh suggests, precisely during the reform-period between 1820 and 1848 'the Hungarian got lost in Hungarianness'.<sup>15</sup> if József Eötvös and Sándor Petőfi grew up in a landscape of flotsam, if Petőfi had not a clue about the Hungarian depths, in sum, if the period of the greatest upsurge in Hungarian-democratic culture established the basis of destruction, ruin, and loss of Hungarianness – where can one seek hope, where could there be a way leading towards a better future? Of course, László Németh has confusedly utopian plans, but we believe that there is no one today who would avow that a Danubian alliance brought into existence by the 'revolution of quality', by the 'uprising of the til-

13. László Németh, 'Debreceni káte [Debrecen Catechism]', in Németh 1940b, p. 11.

14. István Nagy (1904–77), Romanian-Hungarian writer, in Pinter 1983, p. 229. The Szárszó conference was a landmark oppositional gathering of intellectuals held 23–29 August 1943; major literary figures such as László Németh and Péter Veres, clergy, and political activists participated, debating how to end the War and the fate of Hungary afterwards.

15. Németh 1942.



lers', would be a realistic way forward. That this ideology exercised influence during the oppressive years of counter-revolution resulted only in the ideological support gained from it by the 'third way' dividing the peasantry from the working class. On the other hand, in the domain of culture, understood in the narrowest sense, it resulted in Western-decadent currents streaming from all directions into the ideology and arts of the peasant-movement. It brought with it the pessimism of Ortega y Gasset, Spengler, and company; arrogant hatred of the masses, aristocratism, and anti-humanism; and in their wake, the collapse of literary form and degeneration of content.

Even today, it is urgently necessary to conduct ideological battle against such theories. But that is not enough. The question arises: how could this disconsolate, dark, profoundly anti-democratic, anti-mass world-view become a far from negligible aspect of that movement with the unforgettable merit of finally giving voice to the Hungarian peasantry, and brought their sufferings to expression? It is customary to respond: we should not overestimate the significance of László Németh; he always travelled his own separate paths, alone; he does not represent the actual ideology representing the 'people'. If we view the movement as a whole, this is true. Yet, László Németh represents a not insignificant shade of the movement, a particular tendency of it. It would not be possible, perhaps, to say of any particular writer or publicist that he is explicitly the disciple of László Németh, or his follower; neither, however, would one be able to name many who have remained untouched by his train of thought. Thus, we cannot turn away from this problem.

Out of the previous establishment of an affinity between the international decadent ideology and the Dezső Szabó/László Németh sort of theories (which diverge from it at more than one point), however, it would be superficial to construct a causal link and be satisfied that we have established their relation. It is unquestionable that Ortega y Gasset and company influenced this ideology. But the genuine question only starts here: why was it influenced by them?

If we were to seek the social roots of this ideology, we would undoubtedly stumble across the objectively desperate situation of the Hungarian peasantry during the counter-revolutionary period and, especially, its apathy and loss of hope. Whoever reads the extraordinarily rich and interesting materials of the researchers into village life would at every turn encounter this mood. In his book *Mute Revolution*, for example, Imre Kovács writes: 'And the writer shrieks with his last breath to the people: Yes, a new Dózsa, with a new army. But where now is the time of Dózsa's successors and *where is the people prepared to die?* Although the sects are the forerunners of the revolution, yet good gentlemen, you need not worry: there will be no more peasant-rebellions in

Hungary'.<sup>16</sup> We could, thus, say that if the social stratum in whose name these ideologues speak, refers to its own situation and future in this manner – then how could the ideologues themselves *not* be pessimists?

This is undoubtedly true in part; but only in part. At the outset, every great movement of liberation is in a similar situation. Of course, it is important that they are in a similar situation at the outset; it is essential, but not decisive, because such sentiments appear elsewhere as well, after great defeats and disappointments, if perhaps not as persistently. Moreover, in the majority of cases, they do not engender pessimism, irrationalism, opposition to progress, and loss of perspective in the life of the movement itself; at least not to the extent as is the case, for us, among a segment of the populist movement.

Thus, this 'after-the-revolution' mood of a significant portion of the Hungarian peasantry was a not insignificant element of this pessimism; but it was only an element, not the decisive factor. Moreover, we have not even mentioned the fact that the concrete, decadent forms of this pessimistic worldview certainly do not originate among the peasantry. We must, therefore, seek the decisive reason elsewhere: in that stratum from which a segment of the populist writers originates, or into which many – when they became writers – advanced themselves. If we seem to be confronted, here, with the problem of the 'middle-class' and the 'intelligentsia', then we should not let that mislead us. Ultimately, this question is still the question of the Hungarian working people, and above all, of the peasantry. For the development of the classes never takes place fully in isolation. The total development of society, the movement of the totality of society determines the separate, motivating issues of individual social strata; these are simply intensifications of the total set of issues. This is particularly true for the intelligentsia, which in a rigorous economic sense is not even an autonomous social class.

This total set of issues could be stated thus: in what way does the society of Hungarian working people want to, and in what way can it, eliminate the feudal past and cultivate a new Hungarian democracy? The series of disappointments of the peasantry across the century since 1848 is just one – of course, the most important – side of the coin; the other is the ideological collapse of the intelligentsia discussed above. László Németh perceives this question, and one often experiences with him that he latches onto and poses genuine, essential questions; yet in so many cases, his answers to them are simply skewed and unfounded. László Németh perceives the weighty problems of the period following the Compromise of 1867, the confusions of the development of the Hungarian public and intellectual sphere, the exhaustion of this sphere. Yet,

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16. Kovács 1947, p. 148.

after having established this, he adds that 'the assimilators simply took up residence in this empty space'. What is the real social kernel of this assertion? This: in order to hold onto its position, which was shaken partially by 1848 and to its foundations by later capitalist development; in order to preserve its leading role in the life of the state and society, despite its economic and social superfluity and parasitism, the Hungarian aristocracy and gentry tied Hungary's fate to that of the Habsburg monarchy and, through it, also to Germany. It blocked the free development of the peasantry economically, politically, and culturally; and it rendered permanent the strains between Hungarians and other nationalities.

This fundamental structure and its fatal unfolding are mirrored by the development of the Hungarian intelligentsia. This creates the László Németh-sort of 'empty space', into which, according to him, the assimilators settle. And, finally – indeed, especially – this generates the ideology, the comportment, that develops in those assimilators who are of Hungarian and non-Hungarian origin alike. Antal Szerb wittily called the life-form, comportment, and world-view that originates in this fashion 'gentroid'. This 'gentroidism' is, in the first instance, applicable to those whom the ruling class has taken into itself, who are equally of Hungarian and non-Hungarian origin. (This applies thus to a portion of the Hungarian Jews as well – consider, for example, writers such as Lajos Dóczy.) But, this also shapes the ideology of those who operate in a kind of spiritual ghetto, in the interstices of the dominant society, alongside the dominant ideology.

The revolutionaries brought to light what Ady knew for a long time: that the whole system was unsustainable. Dezső Szabó correctly exposed the cultural worthlessness of assimilation to the gentry, but inasmuch as he changed the social character of this process to a racial one, he narrowed and distorted the true problem. Because where is, in truth, the path to renewal? Objectively – to refer to the old wisdom of Ferenc Deák – by unbuttoning that waistcoat badly buttoned up after 1848, by carrying to completion that which after the failure of 1848 has been deferred. And, at one blow – if not with immediate effect – we will have solved the whole question of 'assimilation'. In fact, already in 1848 – as László Németh himself correctly perceived – Damjanich, Leininger, the 20,000 Jewish home guards,<sup>17</sup> not to mention Petöfi,<sup>18</sup> were all a quite

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17. Jews were active in the 1848–9 war for Hungarian independence.

18. The father of Petöfi, the great poet of the Hungarian independence-struggle, was a Slav, either Serbian or Slovak; Petöfi's birth-certificate bears the name Alexander Petrovics.

different sort of 'assimilators' than Molnár or Herczeg.<sup>19</sup> Why? Because, with *different* social relations, they were assimilating to a *different* social reality.

Even the best part of the Hungarian intelligentsia – undoubtedly *also* under the influence of the weaknesses of the peasant-movement – shrunk back in fright from truly radical, revolutionary transformation. On the one hand, their isolated situation carried them in the direction of the ideology of decadence; on the other hand, this ideology, once it had begun to influence them – as the plebeian Péter Veres wrote in his autobiography<sup>20</sup> – filled the ideologues with doubts. In what did they have doubts? In the power of the Hungarian people to bring about renewal. Now, if the István Tisza sorts warn against making a 'leap into the dark', this conception is directly traceable to their class-situation. If, however, such fear emerges in the radical peasant-intelligentsia, then it renders weakness absolute, inflates the feeling of weakness into cultural philosophy, the science of Hungarianness, and race-theory.

László Németh is right when he sees and investigates the fate of those tragically fallen along the road of Hungarian culture. He is right when he recognises the typical series of great tragedies from Berzsenyi to Katona, and through Kemény up until Vajda. But he is not right – and he makes a mythology of weakness – when he takes to be 'more Hungarian' those who failed, who were 'left behind'. And it is a direct, national danger if such a view of the past appears together with the claim that it is supposed to illuminate the path of the future. For this view implies a dedication to every sickness of the past of the Hungarian people and to every obstacle to its development. For devotion to *this* past means: despite all the criticisms and hatreds of ideologues such as these, they are incapable of detaching themselves from the gentried and gentroid Hungary. They fear the collapse of *this* as a danger for Hungarian culture. (Of course, for the great majority, their relation to the old Hungary, which I have sketched out here, is not conscious.)

Every true revolution is, at the same time, a cultural revolution. But, if revolution brings with itself a genuine social renewal, then – however many excesses of the transitional period there might be – it never endangers the genuine national culture. The Puritan Revolution in England prohibited the theatre and along with it the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. What harm did this do? The true renaissance of Shakespeare, his true valuation and popularity, was brought by those whom the revolution elevated to

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19. Lukács is thus contrasting those members of national minorities, Slavs, Germans, and Jews, who 'assimilated' themselves to the Hungarian independence-struggle, with those of later vintage who sought to assert their 'Hungarianness' by conformity to 'gentroid' and high-bourgeois cultural values.

20. Veres 1937.

the ruling stratum; and it does not much matter that this turn took place a few generations after Cromwell. We have no reason to fear for Hungarian culture, the culture of Petőfi and Ady, from such a revolutionary change either. As for the tragic fallen ones of Hungarian culture, indeed, even the tragically mistaken ones, they will all retain, throughout the revolutionary change, their historical place: although perhaps for different reasons than previously.

But, this fear has spread among a wide stratum of intellectuals; this is a social fact. And – we believe – by now even its social roots have become visible. The tiny, weak, isolated progressive or revolutionary élite – with weak echoes on the peasant-side, surrounded by that gentroid world that conformed to everyone, up to Hitler and Szálasi, who would accept assimilation – formed its world-view out of its own weaknesses and in part from those of the peasantry as well. This is why it fell victim to the decadent ideology of the Western bourgeoisie. This is why it very often sought the way not to peasant-revolution, but to utopian reform, in the vain hope that it would, in this way, strengthen itself externally and internally (the people's school-movement, and such like).

We can thus reiterate what Lenin said about Tolstoy: the Hungarian populist movement is also the mirror of the weaknesses of the peasantry.

#### IV

We had to speak in detail about all these questions, because their ideological influence was extraordinarily strong. Not only did this manifest itself in the fascistisation of individuals, but – with few exceptions – it had a great effect on the whole populist movement. At the Szárszó conference, László Kardos pertinently criticised the political implications of this decadent idealism: 'When there needed to be said: land, we heard: soul and cultivation. When it was bread and rent, then we heard: morality and spirit'.<sup>21</sup> Yet, despite all this, it is not a contradiction if, once again, we assert: the populist movement signified the first and only great step forward in the Hungarian literature of the last quarter-century. One might say: even a step beyond Ady, although neither higher than Ady, nor in the direction of Dezső Szabó or László Németh. It would not be difficult to say why: because here and only here the lyrical prophecy of Ady developed into the initiating, concrete self-recognition of the Hungarian working people. For the first time since the literature prior to 1848 – passing over a few isolated great writers – Hungarian literature now again reflects the true desires and passions of the working people.

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21. László Kardos, in Pinter 1983, p. 234.

We are accustomed to characterising the better part of populist literature as village-research literature. It is that, but also much more. The fact that the Hungarian village needed to be 'researched' was a sign of the sickness of development up to this point, but, at the same time, a sign that the recovery had begun. It represented the beginning of the recovery-process for the Hungarian people in that Hegelian sense in which the point of departure of every activity is to articulate that which exists. It represented the beginning of recovery for Hungarian literature because it began seriously to break out of the infection of decadent influences, decadent false problems, and false refinements. Strength and weakness emerge here intertwined, not separate; there are no sharp boundaries separating the one from the other. The thirst for reality that thus comes into being, the courageous confrontation even with the most uncomfortable truths, is not infrequently the result of difficult, inner struggles. Here, too, Gyula Illyés expressed this feeling most beautifully:

You who lied so much, don't lie any longer.  
Don't pretend that shadows and scents follow you,  
throat-clearing of heroes, high temptations!  
No one follows and no one calls you; poetry  
is not for mystifying the people,  
nor yourself. The world is simple;  
what two eyes see gives enough to do.  
Objects shine. Give your pencil a lick.<sup>22</sup>

But, strength and weakness are not just, in this way, psychologically and morally interwoven, but, also, in world-view and artistic aspects as well. Illyés's poem at once and succinctly expresses two things: it implies a resolute turning away from the pseudo-problems of pure 'inner' life, and, at the same time, demands the precise revelation of simple facts, the facts of real life, without anything added and without any retouching; in short, the facts as they are – without distinction as to desires, curiosities, or perspectives.

The epochal significance of this comportment for Hungarian literature was the discovery of the real village and the real peasantry. It is a new world that, with the force of a monstrous reality, smashes *en masse* the fixed prejudices, reveals completely new facts and relations, casts new light on important periods of Hungarian history. Every abstractly confected, general conception of the peasantry crumbles into nothing in this concreteness of fact set next to fact. We have only to think of books such as *People of the Plains* to see: until

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22. Gyula Illyés, 'Reggeli meditáció [Meditation at Breakfast]', Illyés 1977c, p. 287.

now, we knew nothing of the servants' life on the great estates of Hungary; a new world stood before us. We discovered America in our immediate neighborhood, in our own homeland. And this statement refers to more than a few other books of the village-researchers' movement as well.

It cannot be our task, here, even schematically to introduce this rich literature. We must only emphasise a few decisive questions of world-view and artistic method. Above all, there is the pathos of discovering and disclosing reality: the pathos of the new world that, at the same time, is also our own deepest reality. This permeates even the driest descriptions and statistics. In many respects, of course, what village-research offers is only raw material for political results as well as for artistic works. But it is peculiar, singular raw material. Like those songs and ballads from which a new epos is called into existence.

We must underscore the ascetic obstinacy of the village-researchers' search for, and revelation of, reality. These writers want reality and truth, just because. Let there be truth – destroy the legends! Both in the present and in the past. I bring up only one very interesting example, very important for the future: the peasantry's relation to the 1848 Revolution in the works of Darvas and Illyés. We have got from them new images of the reciprocal relations of the different strata of the peasantry, the process of the peasantry's disintegration, how differently, from region to region, even village to village, the peasant became bourgeois or proletarian.

We have spoken of the ascetic obstinacy of the revelation of reality. The other side of this, however, is a weakness: the empiricism of the village-researchers. They provide facts, new, surprising, well-observed and well-registered facts; in most cases, too, they stick to the arraying of raw, sheer facts. Of course, not all in the same way. On the one hand, especially with Erdei, and, along with him, Darvas, Ortutay, and others, we find serious attempts to explain the facts socially. On the other hand, not a few writers – among them, often, even Péter Veres – array empirical facts, and then all at once we find conclusions that are not derived from them, that do not grow out of them, and that are frequently confused and mystical. This empiricist clinging to facts and this pasted-up, mystical construction appears to be opposed extremes; however, methodologically they are related in the closest way possible. Already, Engels called attention to how modern mystical tendencies grew up precisely on the territory of an exaggerated empiricism. They are the methodological consequences of a dread of consistent, thoroughgoing, all-embracing theoretical elaboration. We believe that no further explanation is needed to see how the anti-progress and irrationalist positions described above, opened huge cracks in the ideology of the populist writers into which such mystical currents could flow.



The 'literature of fact' was itself an international current of the period (consider the dominant *Neue Sachlichkeit* in Germany).<sup>23</sup> But this development played out in completely particular forms in Hungarian-populist literature. In Germany, it gave rise to a bad, epigonal form of naturalist literature, which had as its basic tendency, a certain indifference, disappointment in the revolution, moral cynicism, hopelessness, and lack of perspective. Our discussion above has indicated the points of contact. But it also indicated the fundamental difference of tone. For the Hungarian-populist writers, disappointment and hopelessness still have – even where these are excessive – a tragic pathos. This is because precisely among the best of these writers, the lyric of disappointment is always first and foremost a lament for the fate of the peasantry and not, or at least not solely, the 'intellectual' sorrow of one's own loneliness and isolation. It is because their objective, reality-directed expression – although, as in contemporary Western literature, the object remains an empiricist 'fact' – is not simply a description of some external (often arbitrarily selected) 'fact', but, rather, channels the voice of reality itself, the life of the peasantry. It is because the object, the 'fact', is all at once and indeed primarily a subject as well, reacting back upon literary form with the force of a subject.

Formally, populist literature has very strong contact with German *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In both, we can remark the confluence of publicistic and belle-lettristic elements. But, while in Germany, even among the gifted writers (let us think only of Brecht), an inartistic or anti-artistic *mélange* arises from this confluence, here in Hungary the confluence creates peculiar and characteristic forms, which work like torn-up pieces, fragments of a new epos in formation: the awakening of the Hungarian peasant to new life. In this respect, these transitional forms between belle-lettrism and publicistic writing exhibit a certain kinship with the literature of the 'dark' period of Russian history after the 1880s, with writers such as Saltykov-Shchedrin, Gleb Uspensky, and Vladimir Korolenko. Of course, only a certain kinship. For among such Russian writers, the decadent-pessimistic mentality, its moral and artistic poison and the fact-clinging empiricism connected to it, were all completely absent. Nevertheless, even the distant kinship noted here is indicative of the particular place of populist literature in the historical evolution of Hungarian culture.

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23. *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity) was an artistic tendency in visual arts and literature in Germany in the 1920s; it emphasised a photographic registration of the surface of appearance and, in the literary domain, the documentary registration of facts. Lukács saw in it a decadent phase of naturalism, which he contrasted to genuine realism, which reveals the interrelations and mediations between the social facts represented in a narrative or work of art.



The difference emphasised, here, between Russian and Hungarian literature is primarily not aesthetic, but social. The 'dark' period of Russian history was followed by the revival of the workers and peasants, by the epic moments of 1905 and 1917. The Hungarian peasantry did not liberate itself, not even with the help of the Hungarian workers. The victory of the Red Army brought freedom and land to the peasantry, not the power of Hungarian workers themselves. The problematic nature of the world-view and artistry of populist literature was, in this sense, a precise mirror of the real weaknesses of the Hungarian peasant-movement.

## V

We emphasised that the half publicistic, half belle-lettristic character of a large segment of populist literature can be traced back to grounds that are in the first instance social, and only secondarily aesthetic. Likewise, first social, then aesthetic reasons determine why they rise far above contemporary German tendencies and why they remain far behind Russian ones that are, in certain respects, analogous. Despite this, or rather, precisely because of it, it is necessary to cast one more glance at populist literature from the aesthetic point of view as well.

It is not our task here to give even a sketchy overview. Let us single out a peak-achievement such as Illyés's *People of the Plain*. What this book signifies as a revelation of facts, we have already discussed. But this work is much more than a mere revelation of facts; scattered among the descriptions that establish facts, discovering and exposing the social situation, are included moving pieces of Gyula Illyés's autobiography. Namely, the sketch-like portraits of his parents and grandparents – which, even in their intentionally fragmentary form, serve the work's primarily publicistic goal, give the impression of scattered bits of a huge peasant-legend. There are pages whose reading recalls Gorky's monumental autobiography, not only because of the thematic kinship, but also because one can and must judge the suggestive contours and popular depth of the figures at this level of quality. Yet, once again, the two facets of populist literature stand before us: in the qualitative level of the material, view, and figural conception, Illyés converges with Gorky, while, in the degree of artistic consummation, they diverge. The reason for the latter is unquestionably the publicistic askesis. But, alongside and beneath this, deeper motives also operate, revealing once again the close relation of this newly commenced flourishing of Hungarian realism with the strength and weaknesses of the development of the Hungarian peasantry.

The artistic problems surfacing here stand in the closest relation with the problem of perspective. Illyés correctly said and polemically emphasised that, for the populist writer, it was not so important where he came from, but, rather, whither he was going. This is very true, and it is especially so if the 'whither' is as deep and true as it is for Illyés, Péter Vères, Ferenc Erdei, and József Darvas. In one of his poems, Illyés beautifully delineated the relation of 'whence' and 'whither':

They look up to me, these from whence I came: the dregs-people.  
My road broken with troubles – like across dense hills  
holding in hand the branch before the followers –  
thus I came, so that this way would also be for them a way.<sup>24</sup>

In this relation, it becomes clear how oppressive and obstructive to the true heights of thought and artistry is that world-view we analysed above; how much this outlook increases the problematic situation of depicting the Hungarian peasantry, a depiction that is already tragic and indicates a way out of tragedy only with great difficulty. It is not by chance that Gorky, following the experiences of the 1905 Revolution, wrote his autobiography during the nascent, new upsurge of the Russian revolutionary movement; that, precisely in this period, he formed out of the environment of his childhood – especially from the figure of his grandmother – a new, legendary figure of the Russian people. In Hungarian-populist literature, as we see, this perspective is lacking, or at least it exists only in an obscured form, for both subjective and objective reasons. It is for lack of such perspective that, in Illyés's publicistic writing, his material is scattered in rows of fragments, calling out loud for depiction in the manner of 'great realism'.

Thus, the question of genuine, great realism is brought to the surface. And, here again, we see the inauspicious character of such world-views for realism, such world-views as touch upon, or even descend into, decadence. Wherever these tendencies begin to flourish explicitly, they turn directly against realism. Commenting on his favourite philosopher, Ortega y Gasset, László Németh thus writes: 'We depicted not the felt reality of the spirit, but rather the measured reality of the world. We were realists, but this realism is the greatest reality: confutation through spirit. Realism is thus an equally cowardly self-submission of the spirit before the world, as was the cowardly submission of utilitarianism to the dark idolatry of circumstances. The life-mood of the twentieth century finds its way back from the world to the spirit. Instead of depicting the spatial reality of things, it depicts intuitions'. This contrary

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24. Gyula Illyés, 'Az Itéletmondóhoz [To the One Pronouncing the Sentence]', Illyés 1977e, pp. 422–3.

opposition of 'spirit' and reality implies the destruction of realism, and it is not accidental that the influence of Ortega y Gasset, Spengler, and such like occasioned a cult of modern anti-realism in not a few writers in the circle of the populists. Only a few did the tendency remain completely untouched by this influence.

This is not, however, the main issue if we are seeking the decisive obstacles to the development of great realism. The anti-realist theory and practice of André Gide, James Joyce, and such like, is only a reflection – of course, unconscious – of the fact that the life-material of decaying imperialism cannot be shaped into a pure work of art by the participant in this process of decay. Thus – *mutatis mutandis* – the sickness of Hungarian social life, objectively in terms of material, subjectively in terms of ideology, is resistant to the large-scale, unitary, realistic depiction of life. The registration of 'fact' is partially a retreat in the face of this problem, partially a compromise with it.

In any case, we must be clear that the foundational categories of great realist depiction – for instance, the comprehensive unity of plot in the epic and drama – are only the mirror image of the real, essential processes actually playing out in society. Of course, we must add that the essence of these can only become visible and approachable from certain elevated vantage-points. One of the first artistic consequences of the lack of perspective that we discussed above, both in objective and subjective terms, is the fact that, on the terrain of this world-view, one cannot compose a plot that would depict the whole social dynamic through the concrete and individual, yet typical, destinies of concrete and individual, yet typical, characters.

The interwar counter-revolutionary development isolated the classes, especially the peasantry, excluding them from public life; along with this, individuals were also isolated, compelled to withdraw into themselves. Is it now possible artistically to make up for this shortcoming in the material of life? In the immediate sense, in no way. Zsigmond Móricz, who, as a true-born, great narrator at the end of his career, tried in his 'Sándor Rózsa' novels to depict in epic form the main issues of the 1848 Revolution, clearly felt this problem very painfully. Concretely, for him it was a matter of how he could organically draw the main issues and main figures of the 1848 Revolution into a plot that plays out amidst peasant-life. Precisely because Móricz's immense artistic honesty brooked no deceit or dodges, the roles of Lajos Kossuth, Jókai, Pál Nyáry, and such like remain no more than 'inserts' – montage, as one was accustomed to say at one time – not the organic relation and reciprocal influence of the upper and lower social world, as in the historical novels of Walter Scott or Tolstoy, which came into being in more favourable times.

As we said: in the immediate sense, the shortcoming in life-material cannot be made up for artistically. Yet, 'the same' material can reveal quite different

aspects, according to the degree to which the author's view of humanity and society penetrate it. The dualism in populist literature clearly shows that the very same László Németh, who just a moment ago appeared as the messenger of decadent anti-realism, wonderfully indicates the essence of this question, and indeed, precisely with reference to Hungarian literary history: 'Petőfi blossomed in an age in which it seemed that the spell, which had cursed the Hungarian prince into a toad, was being broken. ... If the tone of the 1840s had been maintained, if the extended hands had not been broken off, if the mouths opened to rejoice had not been stopped, then Petőfi's ethnic feeling would have become the new, redeemed principle of the race: the scent of the prince's body when the toad's skin is shed. Of course, since then we have fallen back into the age-old lethargy. The triumphant Toldi has become a tired Bende the Brave...'.<sup>25</sup>

Breaking the evil spell is one of the greatest artistic vocations of great realism and, by means of this, one of its greatest social callings as well. For this profound artistic issue is never exclusively an artistic concern: its reference encompasses the social development, the *direction* of social development, the question of perspective that László Németh so intelligently sketched out for Petőfi and Arany. Yet, has great realism's counter-effect on the spell disappeared in contemporary times? No. Examples of this for us are Béla Bartók and Attila József. Only for decadent, reactionary bourgeois world-views and literature has it disappeared.

At the same time, great realism is one of the fundamental tendencies of authentic, truly revolutionary working-class culture. This is the foundation of Gorky's epic artistry; it is not accidental that the mature Gorky so energetically emphasised the popular and folkloric roots of truly great realist art. But, perhaps even more interesting an example is what Martin Andersen Nexö said about his own production: according to him, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Pontoppidan's *Hans Im Glück*, and his own *Pelle* are modern variations of the very same popular fable. But, for our purposes here, one thing is key: while Pontoppidan's superb novel offers an image of the loneliness of disillusionment, Nexö (just like Gorky) depicts the people and the workers – in the broad historical sense, just like, in their time, Petőfi and Arany, though with artistic means of a completely different sort – as the prince from whom the spell has been lifted, who, with the help of the liberating power of the workers' movement, through the efforts of its own labour, power, and faith, can break the spell and become a society-transforming personage, a 'prince'.

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25. Németh alludes to an early work of János Arany, *Toldi*, which narrates the tale of the legendary fourteenth-century folk hero Miklós Toldi, and a late ballad, 'Efféli Párbaj [Midnight Duel]', which tells of the disastrous wedding-celebration of the aged knight Bende.

Here, we can take precise stock of what, literarily, the populist literary movement has lost by not seeking, and not finding, a sufficiently intensive connection to working-class culture. (Of course there are also exceptions, like Ferenc Erdei.) Here, we are not speaking of politics and social outlook; it suffices to refer to literature. From this point of view, for example, we must set László Németh's novel, *Guilt*,<sup>26</sup> which is quite talented but dimly lacking in perspective and, thus, in the last analysis, proximate to naturalism, alongside István Nagy's novels, which are much weaker in their literary technique.

Why is this question so important and topical? Because the spell is now broken. In a manner that no one anticipated in advance: history brought it to pass. It liberated the Hungarian peasantry and delivered land to it. But, with this, the struggle for liberation, which populist literature so seriously and importantly heralded, has only *begun*. The true liberation of the peasantry and, with it, the emergence of the energies of the Hungarian people, the cultural unity of the working people of Hungary today still lies ahead of us as only goals to be attained, as the object – and subject – of future struggles. If populist literature was the awakening appeal in the night of the counter-revolution, then today, when carrying through this process of liberation has become an everyday-issue, it can play a still greater role, and it is imperative that it do so. Only with its contribution can Hungarian literature cultivate its true unity and experience a new upsurge; only then can literature play its leading role in the victory and strengthening of democratic ideology. The objective and subjective conditions exist, but as always, only as potentials, though very real, concrete potentials.

If we have weighed the positive and negative aspects of the development to date of the populist-literary movement, we have done so in the interest of the future. Only such a future-oriented criticism can indicate the path that leads towards the genuine renewal of literature: a struggle against the burdensome legacy of the past and against decadent, reactionary ideological remnants; the struggle to create workers' and peasants' associations in every domain of culture, as a pledge that the coming Hungarian literature – just as was the case with the greatest individual representatives of Hungarian literature at that time – will no longer recognise the false and harmful duality of village and city, populist and 'urbanist' literature. For this purpose, self-criticism is necessary, but it is my conviction that thorough study and self-criticism is just as necessary on the so-called urbanist side as on that of the populists. Not in the sense that the urbanist writers made the same mistakes. It must be acknowledged that a notable part of the urbanist writers and ideologues took a

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26. Németh 1936.

stand sharply opposed to fascism and its precursors; any objectivity demands that this be recognised. But *how* this taking of a stand occurred mirrors precisely all the weaknesses of the development of the Hungarian urban bourgeoisie, just as the errors of the populist movement's ideologues mirror the weaknesses and errors of the Hungarian peasantry and historical middle-class. In what does this 'how' consist? And at what point, in my view, do the ideologues of the urbanists – if they seriously want unity, if they seriously want the melding together of Hungarian culture – have to exercise self-criticism? One might say that it is in the voicing of criticism that it becomes manifest. I refer to one of my old critical articles that I wrote about eight or nine years ago, in which I emphasised that a notable portion of urbanist writers wrote passionately against any sort of reactionary manifestation, but only rose to the cool heights of scientific objectivity when the issue of land was under discussion.<sup>27</sup> With reference to this old observation of mine, I wish to say that in their object and content, the criticisms that the urbanist writers made against the reactionary errors of populist literature had much in them that was true, but they did not, however, really understand what was actually taking place therein. This lack of understanding mirrors – and here one should place the emphasis – the ideology of a stratum that was repelled by fascism and hated reaction, but was unable to do anything against it in any effective way. Why? Because, in their ideology and conception, they were anti-democratic and feared the genuine mobilisation of the masses. In this respect, coming to terms with the past is equally necessary, if in different ways, for both urbanist and populist literature. There are fewer compromised people on the side of urbanist literature than among the populists, but this 'uncompromised' status is of the sort that the Abbé Siéyès represented when, after the French Revolution, asked what he did, answered: 'I was surviving.' They remained clean, but precisely because they did not take part in anything. Although I am very far from excusing the reactionary errors of the populist movement, it must be acknowledged that, in truth, according to their own abilities, they participated in the struggle for the liberation of Hungary. And if, in wading across this sea of mud and blood, they muddied themselves, not just their boots, but their hands and faces as well, I do not know that this mud is much worse than the cleanliness that results from withdrawal, from concealing oneself in an ivory-tower, from retreating from the masses.

March 1946

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27. Lukács, 'Harc vagy kapituláció?' [Struggle or capitulation?], in Lukács 1945 IF, p. 79.

## Chapter Seven

### Poetry of the Party<sup>1</sup>

The following considerations are not primarily concerned with Attila József himself.<sup>2</sup> Their subject-matter is more general: they attempt a clear sketch of a problem that is very topical today, a problem that many today, both in and outside the party, find a quite delicate and uncomfortable question: poetry of the party. Of course, it is no accident that we are

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1. The title 'Pártköltészet' contains a dual meaning that will be dialectically developed by Lukács over the course of the essay. In its more literal and conceptually straightforward sense, it means 'poetry of the party', in the sense of a political poetry identified with the programme of a particular, organised party. But early in the essay, Lukács complicates this view by claiming that 'poetry of the party' can, under some circumstances, anticipate the historical emergence of the political party to which it actually should 'belong'. Moreover, the word 'párt' also carries the more general sense of 'taking sides' or 'partisan', which Lukács will make fully explicit towards the end of the essay, arguing that such *partisanship*, rather than strict adherence to the everyday party-programme, constitute the true basis of identification between the poet and the political party. Hence, in Lukács's view, the particular ideological-literary orientation of the poet, the historical state of development of the party, and the potentially contradictory interplay of everyday tactical tasks and the long-term strategic mission of the party all interact to define a given concrete instance of 'pártköltészet' – poetry of the party/partisan poetry – and thus Lukács's employment of the term reveals a markedly dialectical flexibility.

2. Attila József's poetic world-view encompassed anarchist, Marxist, and Freudian ideas. József suffered periodically from mental illness and died from being run over by a train, in ambiguous circumstances that are commonly thought to indicate suicide. Raised in conditions of extreme poverty, for a brief period in the early 1930s he was a member of the illegal CP in Hungary; after World War II, he was claimed by the Communist Party as a major proletarian writer, while many aspects of his life, work, and ideas that were incompatible with this image of József were conveniently glossed over during the years of socialism in Hungary. Lukács's essay was originally delivered as one of two lectures in a key event in the postwar canonisation of József as a Communist Party cultural monument: an anniversary commemoration at the CP national headquarters on what would have been József's fortieth birthday. The two lectures, both delivered by influential CP cultural intellectuals, were published as a book shortly afterwards: MKP 1946.



considering this question precisely here and precisely today, and precisely in order that, by sharply outlining its various branches in an uncompromising style, without glossing things over, we can put an end to its embarrassing side. It is not by chance that we are making this attempt on this occasion: Attila József's personality and poetry raise the issue of party-poetry as the question of the day. One can neither understand the relation of party and poetry in today's Hungary without considering Attila József, nor can one appreciate the value of Attila József's poetry without a serious determination of the essential aspects of the poetry of the party.

# I

The common view, at least the view of a broad stratum, discovers here a false dilemma: on the one side, supposedly, stand the poets of the party, and on the other side, 'pure' poets who withdraw to the ivory-tower. This false dilemma is an old one, with a history dating back more than a century. Approximately one hundred years earlier, at that time still not yet on the side of the revolution, Ferdinand Freiligrath declared: 'Der Dichter steht auf einer höheren Warte als auf den Zinnen der Partei [The poet stands on a higher watch than on the ramparts of the party]'.<sup>3</sup> Georg Herwegh intervened against him, passionately declaring the *raison d'être* of the poetry of the party; and the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which was under the editorship of the young Marx, at that time not yet a socialist, but only an adherent of revolutionary democracy, took a sharp stand beside Herwegh.

This false dilemma, as customarily so often happens in practice, reveals itself most purely, most instructively, and most comprehensibly in its caricatural forms. I will begin with an example from my own experience. Perhaps about fifteen years ago, the recognised German Communist poet Erich Weinert showed up in despair at the Union of German Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers. The reason for his distress was tragicomic in the extreme. Some

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3. In his 1841 poem, 'Aus Spanien [From Spain]', Freiligrath wrote of a hero who could admire Napoleon while being outraged at Napoleon's notorious execution of the Duc d'Enghiens on trumped-up charges: 'He bent his knee to the hero Bonaparte / And heard d'Enghiens' cry of death with rage / The poet stands on a higher watch / Than on the ramparts of the party.' He was answered by the poet Georg Herwegh in the poem, 'Die Partei [The Party]', which made an impassioned plea for partisanship and 'tendency' in poetry: 'Party! Party! Who should not take party, / which were the mother of all victory? / How might a poet scorn such a word / A word that bears everything glorious?' These poems set off a many-sided polemic for and against tendential literature, and are thus seen as exemplary indices of the ideological orientations among German writers prior to 1848.



workers' organisation, a trade-union, if I remember correctly, commissioned an anthem from him. To the given melody, he wrote a poem with a length of 18 lines. The commissioning organisation stipulated, however, that into these 18 lines, he had to 'work in' 22 slogans of the day. The long-experienced Weinert, with much perspiration, performed this task as well. But afterwards, when the poem was ready, the commissioning organisation wanted him to 'work in' yet two more slogans, which in the meantime had become essential, into his verse. It was under these circumstances that Weinert showed up at our circle in despair...

The other side of the false dilemma in today's practice exhibits itself thus: in the November issue of *Magyarok* ['Hungarians'], István Vas<sup>4</sup> considered the view 'that today, when life has turned around 180 degrees from the situation a year ago, sober people cannot carry on from whence they left off'. He introduces this opinion in the form of a quotation from a leading politician, an opinion which one of our outstanding writers had then made his own. Vas, in opposition to this writer, expresses his own point of view thus: 'We are however those few who have no reason or desire to carry forward anything other than what we once started'. And as to how we are to understand this 'we', the author also clearly states: 'For us, who with the encouragement of Deszö Kosztolányi and Mihály Babits, set out...'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the author is firmly convinced that neither Babits nor Kosztolányi nor their disciples have anything to learn from fascist oppression, from the destruction, liberation, and reconstruction of Hungary. Budapest is blasted to ruins, but the ivory-tower stands undamaged in its old place. No doubt, this is a caricatural manifestation of the other false extreme. In the descriptions of war, one often finds this poetic image, that the artillery thunders and swoops down in all directions, but the ladybug peacefully strolls on the blade of grass. Of course, the

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4. In an essay entitled 'Irodalmunk időszerű kérdései [Timely Questions of Our Literature]', Vas set out four reasons for lack of 'instruments of production' in the literature of the present and for its 'impoverishment': the early death of the greats of the pre-War generation, many of whom died in their forties and fifties; the death of a substantial number of younger talents under fascism and in the War; the problematic politics of the so-called 'populist' writers; and the material shortages of space, food, and other necessities. He goes on to defend the humanistic legacy of the pre-war modernist humanists, the 'urbanist' tendency of *Nyugat*, against the criticisms of Marxists such as György Lukács in his 1945 republication of essays written in the USSR during the War, Lukács 1945b. For the important 'urbanist'/'populist' split in Hungarian interwar literature, see also Lukács's essay, 'Populist Writers in the Balance', in this volume.

5. Vas refers to the novelist and poet, Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), and poet and essayist, Mihály Babits (1883–1941), the outstanding representatives of the pre-World War II progressive humanism and literary modernism of *Nyugat*.

ladybug had no pretension to pronounce a high-handed judgement about the War and the postwar situation.

Both of these caricatures are living proof that the question has been posed falsely. The caricatural aspect of the Weinert case is clear. Of course, this case is also a caricature of something that derives from reality itself with a certain necessity. One cannot have mass-propaganda without sensuous, succinct, and striking concentration of messages: propaganda-posters and poems serve this goal. Such methods of mass-influence were not invented by parties, but, rather, by large capitalist industries that mass-produce necessary goods. Once this method has come into existence, however, in the given social relations, a party can no longer relinquish such means of influence.

We must acknowledge, on the other hand, that often the truly effective, concise pertinence of the poster or propaganda-poem only by chance coincides with its painterly or poetic value. If it stops passers-by on the street, if it really drums into them that which it exists to advertise, it perfectly fulfils its calling, entirely independently of the presence or absence of this 'accidental' artistic value in it. The main reason why their coincidence is fairly improbable is the prosaically strict and narrowly circumscribed specificity of content, which excessively binds the free play of artistic imagination. The advertisement, for instance, does not encourage cleanliness as such, it does not pose general human questions of hygiene. Rather, it publicises a particular brand of soap.

Such a binding of imagination, however, also plays a role in the everyday questions of political life. Everyday party-propaganda is most often intended to implant certain concrete and rigorously circumscribed everyday slogans into people's heads, in which the party's large-scale historical and philosophical perspectives most often play a role only as a more or less blurry background. The content here is, in most cases, too narrow and too precise – typically and not just in exceptional cases – for the poetic or artistic imagination to exercise itself.

Even clearer is the falsity of the opposed extreme. The writer here gives his form and experiences such a wide, general, and abstract frame that every essential content dissolves and crumbles away. And, if the poet wants to unify these experiences in a creative work, the content seized upon precisely for this reason becomes narrow and insignificant, excluding the essential. In bourgeois thought, it is a common illusion that individual poetic experiences have an exclusively individual character. It is self-evident that individual, lived experience provides a decisive impetus to the poetic work; without it, there is no poetry. The bourgeois illusion consists in identifying the experiential content with the quality of its having been individually experienced,

taken to be the essential form of the process of poetic creation. This content, however, embraces the whole world in itself, especially the whole of society in its own movements and changes, not only in terms of content, but in the entire structure, in the reciprocal interaction of the experiential and poetic forms with this structure.

If any poet should do what the article writer mentioned above counsels, he would shrink his own experiential world. In writers – and indeed often through the influence of social forces not yet recognised by them – certain individual experiential and poetic forms take shape. Our author advises registering them as definitive. But then, these experiential forms, whose original productive function would be to grasp and work through the whole changing world by means of the poet's experience, come to stand as fences between poetic experience and changes in society. They become obstacles to the poet's being able to live through and imagine new realities in their essential nature.

The purely individual aspect of poetic experience, the eternalising of already attained poetic modes of expression have a Quixotic effect in times of great social change, although without exhibiting any of the heroism of the Spanish knight. For this sort of Quixoticism – precisely in times of great social transformation – finds not a little favour in the reactionary camp. For reaction, fearing for and defending its positions, it suffices that a portion, at least, of the leading intellectuals are not in the ranks of the democratic renewal: precisely in a time of great social transformation such 'illustrious' neutrality commonly indicates support for reaction.

Under such external and internal conditions, to turn away from the new reality, to shut oneself off from its productive influences, leads necessarily to distortions and contortions in the poet. Attila József, already very early, recognised these contortions, seeing how such aestheticism turned into low moral quality:

A dry stalk is his soul, and on it sits  
like an ornament a horny little toad;  
it's croaking, and while profits swish  
it makes its peace with older toads.

If from a distance it seemed an emerald,  
touch it and your fingers stick.<sup>6</sup>

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6. From József's 1930 poem, 'Egy költőre [To a Poet]'.

## II

Consideration of this relation leads us to pose the question more essentially. For rejecting social and political life, its changes and turning points, in the name of 'pure' poetry is not simply a matter of poetic content and mode of expression. It is that as well, and, as indicated above, it points in the direction of isolation, impoverishment, and rigidification. But, behind this, stands yet so much more. Withdrawal into the ivory-tower, disdainfully, turning away from daily social life – and whether the author knows it or not – can point in two quite different directions, with quite different emphases.

The stubborn persistence of the ivory-tower world-view has serious, deep social roots. It is a protest against the fundamental anti-artistic tendencies of capitalist society exhibited in every manifestation of life, in different ways, of course, and with different intensity. The protest of 'pure' art against the ugliness and spiritlessness of the capitalist world, however, can direct itself forward or backward, may be progressive or reactionary, depending on when, against whom, and with what emphases it is manifested. It is understandable that a notable portion of Hungarian literature in the preceding counter-revolutionary quarter-century defended itself thus, especially in the final, terrible years. It must not be forgotten, however, that this defence was rather weak. The 'buzzing', as Pál Ignotus<sup>7</sup> called it, for the most part had only a negative content; the turning away, the disapproval, received a trifling, plastic form, the whither-to-turn remained obscure. Even if a direction became clear, its progressive aspect was often extremely dubious.

However, continuing this defence after the liberation, such as is programmatically declared by the *Magyarok* author István Vas, entails – not with clear self-consciousness, of course – that, from the poet's perspective, it is completely indifferent whether fascism or democracy reigns. In the same way, he is closed up in himself, in the same way he excludes from himself that which comes 'from outside', from society: he rejects (consciously or unconsciously) that the role of the poet in the life of a liberated people should be radically different from in that of an oppressed people.

This socio-ideological comportment, unconsciously founded in the experience and conviction that capitalism is unfavourable for art, not only leads to isolation, but also to empty abstraction, because it washes out reality and washes away the essential differences between the periods of democratic and

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7. In 1936, with Attila József, Pál Ignotus helped found the literary journal *Szép Szó*, which appeared between 1936 and 1939. He was a key representative of the progressive 'urbanist' tendency in interwar literary culture. He was imprisoned under the Stalinist dictatorship in 1949 on a fabricated charge of espionage, and was freed in March 1956.

anti-democratic development. It even transforms itself – hopefully not intentionally – into a rejection of democracy, just as in the past, it wanted to be the rejection of tyranny.

It is here that we should recall, if only briefly, Sándor Márai's diaries. We cannot, of course, evaluate the work as a whole, however regrettable it might be not to be able to make reference, for example, to the points of insight in his criticism of the Hungarian middle-class. Here, taking a few examples, we can only shed light on the method of this diary, and we must do this in such a way as to illustrate in an eminent representative, the comportment we seek to investigate.

Márai's attacks on Sándor Petőfi have already become notorious. Let us see what he wrote about the controversy between Napoleon III and Victor Hugo. Napoleon, according to Márai, 'was an exceptionally noble spirit, a dreamer, wanting the best for the workers, talented...'. Later, he continues thus: 'How right Napoleon III was when for two decades he gave France the gift of the peace, splendour, development, and order of the Second Empire...'. Anyone who knows a little of the actual history of France must necessarily know how to evaluate this 'splendour'. One will know not only that the annihilation at Sedan was the necessary, logical consequence of the Second Empire's 'splendour', but also that the social and moral decay during the Napoleonic period so infected the French people that the Third Republic remained sick from this heritage for decades. Only during the crises of the Panama scandal, the Boulanger case, and the Dreyfus affair did it re-awaken from this degradation. (Although it is doubtlessly contrary to Márai's intentions, his argument nevertheless supplies ammunition to those who, in today's difficult time, dreamingly long to go back to the 'peace, order, and splendour' of the Horthy-Bethlen period.)<sup>8</sup> It corresponds precisely to this conception when Márai speaks with enthusiasm about the 'great figure' of Neville Chamberlain and emphasises that the events of the World War have confirmed his far-sighted politics. Whereas, by this time, it was already clear to any thinking person that precisely the 'Munich' politics of Chamberlain and Daladier made possible Hitler's aggression in the whole of Europe.

Finally, it is worth emphasising the fact that Márai, in connection with a French book written after France's defeat, justified, in the name of the 'spirit', Hitler's conquest: '... what is the work of the French on earth? They must now endure Hitler like an attack of sickness. It is not their task to fight, to be aviciously imperialistic, no. It is their mission to think and create in accordance

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8. The Horthy-Bethlen period corresponds roughly with the counter-revolutionary decade that began with the fall of the Council-Republic in 1919.

with their role'. In this chain of thought, two motives are notable. First, Márai discredits the French resistance-movement, in so far as he simply equates it with imperialism. Secondly, he takes it completely for granted that under Hitler's occupation, the prerequisites for the free development and boundless unfolding of the French spirit were still present.

We see that 'pure' poetry, such manifestations of 'spirit' arrive at being able to imagine as advantageous the deepest national humiliation, the most brutal trampling of freedom. It is the great fortune of the French people that, despite such sentiments among their intelligentsia as well, as a whole they forcefully repudiated similar 'spiritual' manifestations. Among us, unfortunately, this capacity for discernment and forcefulness was lacking. If the Hungarian people did not liberate themselves through their own powers, that is, of course, first and foremost due to the bandits collaborating with Hitler; but, also, that portion of the intelligentsia were accomplices, who declared the disarming of the intellectual terrain and accommodation to everything as the only worthy comportment of a cultured person.

Here, we confront the general tendency of the intelligentsia with respect to literature. This trend is so strong that it is growing over the various boundaries between literary groups fighting among themselves. Both in the 'urbanist' and the 'populist' circles, we meet with such currents, dangerous to our national development. It is not accidental that, among the 'populists' we can refer here to none other than László Németh<sup>9</sup> as one who, on this question, is in total accord with the 'urbanist' Sándor Márai. It is not accidental, because there is hardly any intellectual current seeking to block progress and excite opposition to democracy whose spiritual father or grandfather would not be László Németh. In this instance, he is writing about the French writer Henri de Montherlant, and with praise, he emphasises this main theme: 'France's condition today [that is, under occupation by Hitler *G.L.*] is favourable to intellectual freedom... The polluting factory of literature around me is shutting down: the world turns its back on it. In this state of abandonment, creativity is again that which it should be: the emptying of the filled-up soul, without regard to the world'. Approving this, László Németh here refers to the renewal of the French soul. 'What the old France means is that which was overrun by lawyers [that is to say, by democracy *G.L.*]. Consequently, László

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9. In the 1930s, Németh articulated a nationalistic 'Hungarian socialism' or 'revolution of quality' that was anti-Marxist and tinged with racialised themes. He offered schemes for utopian, social reform that drew upon Hungarian village-craft production and communitarian values. At the same time, as a critic, he was well-informed about contemporary-European literary trends that Lukács considered products of a decadent, fascist-leaning strain of modernistic ideology. Németh was one of Lukács's main intellectual nemeses in the 1940s.

Németh envisions here some kind of 'deep-French' programme. Anyone who until now was unclear about the danger of a László Németh-ish opposition of the 'deep Hungarian' to the 'shallow Hungarian' can perhaps understand from this, just where such a 'spiritual history'<sup>10</sup> theory necessarily leads in social practice.<sup>11</sup>

These are just examples, but indicative and important ones. They demonstrate what sort of content emerges from the cult of form and soul in itself. Once and for all, they demonstrate how much of an illusion and a conceit is the poet's pretence to be 'above society' and apolitical. Every writer – simply in so far as he or she writes – engages in politics and adheres to a party. The question is, simply, to what extent this is consciously done.

### III

Posing thus the question of consciousness in this way makes it possible to arrive at our actual problem, how to find the true place of the political poet and the poet of the party among the types of possible literary creation. If we place this consciousness at the centre of our investigation, then – schematically – we can distinguish three degrees. The first, as we saw, is unconsciously, in fact often unintentionally and against his will, a politicising writer. Among us, the most illustrious representative of this type was Mihály Babits.<sup>12</sup> The most illustrious, if only because he bitterly and deeply felt the tragicomic and problematic nature of this disposition; without, of course, being able to rise above the limits of his spiritual framework. The poetry he wrote about the prophet Jonas offers a beautiful example of this struggle with himself, honourable and honest, but hopeless.

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10. I have used the expression 'spiritual history' to translate the Hungarian '*szellemtörténeti*', which is, in turn, a direct appropriation from the German conception of '*Geistesgeschichte*', the idealist theory of intellectual history that underpinned such influential theories of historiography, biography, textual interpretation, and literary history as that of Wilhelm Dilthey. Lukács considered this general tendency to be a symptom of the ideological degeneration of bourgeois philosophy since Hegel, especially when second- and third-generation epigones of Dilthey employed various sorts of racist and nationalist interpretations of the 'soul' or spirit.

11. Németh advanced a racialised theory of 'deep' and 'shallow' Hungarianness, which consigned ethnic groups like Jews to a second-class status that would be politically realised in measures such as the *numerus clauses* introduced in Hungary already in 1920 and the increasingly repressive anti-Jewish legislation of 1938–45.

12. In his *Jonas könyve* ['Book of Jonas'], 1939, Mihály Babits engaged in an anguished self-reflection on the limits of the attempt to withdraw from the wider world. The book is considered Babits's greatest poetic achievement.



It would be too rigid and schematic to confront this type immediately and without transition with the great people's tribunals of poetry,<sup>13</sup> Sándor Petőfi and Endre Ady. Such great writers as Goethe or Balzac, Tolstoy or Thomas Mann, stand precisely as far from the Babits type as from that of Petőfi. Goethe, to take the apparently most apolitical instance, neither during the French Revolution, nor Napoleon, nor the Restoration, withdrew into the ivory-tower of 'pure' poetry. He never denied that these great social and political changes decisively influenced poetry as well: the contents and structures of a changing world required new poetic forms as well. Thus, he vigilantly attended to these changes and always strove consciously to adopt positions towards them, carefully weighing their socially-progressive traits with respect to the utmost development of the human race, to the inner and outer flourishing of a true humanism. This taking of a position and taking sides, which made Goethe an enthusiastic adherent of the Napoleonic period, was not necessarily accompanied in every instance by his passionately intervening in day-to-day political life, nor was this the case with numerous other great representatives of this type.

The fundamental poetic tendency of the great representatives of this type was different. Fielding called himself the history-writer of social life; almost word for word Balzac repeated the same about himself in the preface to his *Human Comedy*. In this way, the leading, central trend is indicated: to provide a broad, deep, and comprehensive picture of the development of social life; to struggle for the progress of the human race, for its higher development, disclosing with the instruments of poetry the pathway of this progress, its motivating forces, along with the inner and outer forces resisting it. A true and faithful mirror of the life of society becomes here the main means of influencing people.

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13. Lukács refers to his earlier essay on the social figure of the artist, 'Volktribune oder Bürokrat? [Tribunal of the People or Bureaucrat?]', published serially in the first, second, and third numbers of *Internationale Literatur* in 1940. In this essay, he applies to the artist a distinction originally introduced by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done?* The bureaucrat, Lenin wrote, focuses only on a sectoral or craft-interest, or makes the generalisation of particular issues, such as trade-union struggles, into an all-encompassing, social critique and revolutionary, political struggle. The professional revolutionary must be a 'tribune of the people', taking up sectoral issues within a more encompassing struggle for political revolution. By analogy, for Lukács, the bureaucratic writer fails to see the task of literature as that of offering a deep, interconnected, general depiction of the social totality, but, rather, takes fragmented or partial representations of social contents to suffice as the basis of literary works. In contrast, the writer as tribune of the people, guided by the tradition of great realism and a popular partisanship that exceeds the constraints of practical party-discipline, is able to portray the dialectical relation of individual choice and social constraint, economic forces and political structures, and so forth.



Of course, if we speak, here, of types, we are outlining only the most general comportment; in them, the most various tendencies, often contradictory among themselves, find room. We see quite a fluctuating intensity of the intention to intervene in everyday life even in the same author. With the objectivity of the great novels of Tolstoy's manhood, for example, the prophetic pathos of his later production stands in sharp opposition. Nevertheless, the two are bound together, in so far as both seek to achieve the poet's intended goal by means of the objective mirroring of the whole of social life. Quite variable is the degree of consciousness as well. Goethe or Gottfried Keller clarify very precisely what they want to achieve with the objective description of the world; the world-picture they mirror, in large part, indicates the aim of their tendencies to intervene in life. In sharp contrast with this, the *Human Comedy* demonstrates precisely the opposite of that which Balzac sought to prove with his writing, while the superb social depiction in *Resurrection* offers a refutation of Tolstoy's religious and moral prophecy. Notwithstanding these and similar oppositions, in this type remains something constant: holding the mirror up to society and, with the help of depiction that comprehends the whole life of society, reveals it, and exposes its lawfulness, also advancing humanity's development.

From here we arrive – through all kinds of complicated transitions – at the genuinely political poet, the type of the poet of the party. The number of transitional instances is infinite, the transitions in reality are always blurred. But it is discoverable in every figure of this world, and, thus, we must not mistakenly demand a precise delineation of the type. If, for a moment, we simply set up such opposed literary instances as Béranger-Balzac, Shelley-Walter Scott, Heine-Goethe, Gorky-Tolstoy, and so on, the true political poet, the type of the poet of the party will take shape before us.

Above all: it is a matter of a poetic type, a primary, poetic type. True historical development reveals precisely the inverse of that which is habitually said about poetry of the party in assorted bourgeois slanders. In large part, they say: at one time, there was 'pure' literature – and then the parties and democratic political life came along and 'corrupted' the poets. In truth, this all played out in precisely the opposite way. Political poetry emerged much earlier than organised modern parties. Here we are not speaking of the lyric poetry of antiquity, because at that time there was a quite developed life of parties. But, at the dawn of bourgeois society, great poets of the party sprung up one after the other, also where there were no parties at all, or where parties had only very casually begun to appear. Thus, Gotthold Lessing, Percy Shelley, indeed even Heinrich Heine were poets of the party – without a party. It is useful to examine this relation a little more closely because it illuminates the essential aspect of our problem.

The first element that strikes our eye is the poet's greater and deeper consciousness of human essence, the human being's innermost values and the intertwining of these values with social life. Once again, the falsity of the dilemma discussed at the beginning is revealed. That which appeared – caricaturely – as political poetry is not unpoetic because its object or occasion is a question of daily life, but, rather, because its pathos does not reach down into life's ultimate questions. The everyday slogans of parties derive from life and – if they properly grasp its content – they can likewise correctly and suitably distil it to the abstractions of a slogan. The political poet analysed in our introductory remarks is, thus, a distorted image of the poet, because he seizes upon an everyday slogan but does not translate it back into that human language from which it originated; he does not reach back to those roots from which the everyday slogan was developed. The apolitical writer (discussed in parallel above) and the putative 'party'-writer, lacking in human and social depth and lost in daily practicalities, are connected by the shortcoming of consciousness that has now become clear. Both uncritically and unconsciously accept the superficial appearance of capitalist society, as if collective and individual life were completely separate, sharply distinct and even contrary to one another. Neither realises that here, as a consequence of the capitalist system of production, a fatal mutilation of the person and intellectual dismemberment of the person has occurred. Neither from a social or a higher-literary perspective does it make a decisive difference which part of the dismembered person the individual writer attempts to offer artificially as the totality, as the complete human being.

What is the difference in consciousness, though, between the great poet who objectively mirrors life, and the political poet in the narrower sense? They have in common the content of consciousness: the complete human being. And they share the humanistic tendency living in every truly great poet: struggle for the complete, the consummate human being. The difference lies in the direction of the social pathos that exists in both types. In the Balzac- or Tolstoy-type of writer, too, the will to intervene, to make change, to reform (thus, the will to take sides, to partisanship) can be found. With these writers, however, the way to express this will is the objective disclosure of the objective dialectic of reality. And from this, the particular possibility follows that what they consciously want may very well be erroneous, indeed, even reactionary, so long as they struggle unflinching along the route of mirroring objective reality with pitiless truthfulness. Thus, Lenin called Tolstoy's works the mirror of the agrarian transformation of 1861–1905 and the peasant-revolution that was its culmination. He hastened to add, however, that Tolstoy,

who faithfully and brilliantly mirrored this process, understood almost nothing of it.<sup>14</sup>

Lessing or Shelley, Heine or Petőfi, Gorky or Ady, however, want to intervene directly in the formation of events. Here, the false self-consciousness of the Balzac- or Tolstoy-sort would have catastrophic consequences. Whereas Balzac's novels can calmly deny their author's legitimist utopia without this contradiction affecting one iota their artistic value, Petőfi's or Ady's verse had to be correctly thought through from the outset for their poems to be truly good. Here, the poet's conception, his subjective thought and feeling, was not simply that which had to give form to the object. Rather, these thoughts and feelings in themselves constituted the directly expressed and depicted object. Thus, a higher level of consciousness, a higher-level understanding of the path of human development, is necessary. It is not by chance that Heine before 1848, Petőfi during 1848, and Ady before 1918 were not only the greatest poets of the period, but also those with the deepest understanding. Their statements to a great extent still hold true today, in contrast with that which we might say about such great, profound and true writers as Balzac and Tolstoy. Among our writers, it suffices, here, to allude to János Arany or Zsigmond Móricz.

#### IV

Such a degree of consciousness necessarily exerts a reciprocal influence both on the artistic form and on the writer's relation to his art.

It is no accident that political poets strictly understood, poets of the party, are, in the majority, lyric-poets. Of course, there are among them dramatists as well, such as Lessing, the young Schiller, Beaumarchais; and there are novelists, such as Saltykov-Shchedrin. Nevertheless, lyric is the most natural mode of expression for the poet of the party, his most homogeneous form. The objective forms, dramatic and epic, offer a certain resistance to the writer's direct pronouncement of his opinion. Where a great political temperament breaks this resistance, as with the young Schiller, this may accordingly result in an expansion of the form; yet, often it leads to an explosion of the form. And, if Lessing or Beaumarchais succeeded in the drama and Saltykov-Shchedrin in the novel in making the objective form an expressive instrument of direct, political intervention, without any subjectivistic shattering of the form, this success was only attained at the price of the poet's concealing his direct will

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14. In Lenin 1973a, pp. 202–9.

to intervene behind the plasticity of objective depiction. That is, both the epic and dramatic form retain their accustomed objectivity. This otherwise very important point of distinction – that these writers succeed in identifying their poetic conception with the objective speaking of the depicted world, whereas, by contrast, in the works of Balzac and Tolstoy, these were in contradiction – does not occasion a decisive *formal* difference.

In this regard, it also plays a role that in the objective forms only the great problems of the period can be grasped in a genuinely poetic fashion, and these much more in precisely their epochal characteristics than in their reference to everyday questions. Everyday questions, narrowly understood, necessarily get pushed into the background. Of course: the conflict of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy (Lessing, Beaumarchais, and so on) and the decay of the noble class (Saltykov-Shchedrin) are, indeed, such epochal questions, which throughout a whole period were also likewise everyday actualities. Thus, they naturally become the themes of that poetry of the party that most ardently yearned to intervene in daily life.

Still, the natural genre for intervening directly in the present was always, and remains, the lyric. The subjectivity of the politically conscious poet can both be immediately effective and express the eternally valid, despite the fact, or rather as a consequence of it, that the truly political poet of the party almost always gives voice to epochal questions, even when he intervenes in everyday life. Ady expresses this aptly: 'Within me the purpose, the many-centuried purpose'.<sup>15</sup>

In every genuine lyric, subjectivity, experience, desire, feelings, impressions, and so on immediately expand to comprehend the world and, likewise, cluster into the outlines of the individual personality's momentary state of being. If the poet of the party is a true poet, then, in his lyric poetry, he will always carry out precisely this process. Only here the experiencing subject is an acting, seeing, and struggling person among other people living in society; and here the world, which the poet has concentrated in his subjectivity, at once and inseparably shows the current of centuries of history and the cliff of the present, which those waves in this moment are besieging.

Thus, it is not true that political poetry, a poetry of the party, must be problematic, not even in its strictly 'poetic' dimension. On the contrary. We see that it is precisely the poetry of the party that can renew and extend all that which had been extirpated from the lyric poetic tradition of antiquity by the sheer 'I-ness' of today's exaggerated individualism: the ode, the hymn, and such like. This renewal does not merely offer formal copies of this tradition,

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15. From Ady's 1913 poem, 'Hunn, új legenda [Hunn's New Legend]'.

but, rather, grasps its essence. Yet we also have to understand that here – ever more consciously – the basic problematic nature underlying modern art is dying out, the problematic status of art itself, which precisely this society's greatest poets and historical writers have lived through most deeply.

From Goethe's *Tasso*<sup>16</sup> to Ibsen's *Epilogue*<sup>17</sup> and to Thomas Mann, the professions of the great objective poets have climaxed in this question: what is art for? Does one have to, is it worth it to, morally is it justified to sacrifice the artist's human being for the sake of artistic creations? While answering this question, Tolstoy, in the meantime, more than once turned directly against art. This problematic situation is not accidental, nor does it derive from the individual despair of certain great artists. The development of capitalist society, the place of the arts in this society, calls into existence this problematic state of affairs. The higher the degree of the poet's artistic objectivity, the deeper he grasps the problems of the epoch, the more he expresses them with artistic perfection – and the more rootless will they appear in the daily life of capitalism. (Of course, also: the deeper the roots will grow into the collective development of the human race.) From this social development results the despair of the artist, the despair of the truly great and thoughtful writer. They experience art itself, and especially the individual life exhausted in artistic creation, as essentially problematic, as the focal point of insoluble, tragic conflicts. Because the truly great and thoughtful artist can never be content with the conceited perfection of the aesthete's studio. Deep in his soul, he senses the social calling of truly great art: the problematic condition that echoes everywhere from Goethe to Thomas Mann in a tragic key, derives from capitalist society's offering no appropriate place for either the art-work or the artist.

It is now quite characteristic – and for the perspective of the philosophy of the history of the arts, extraordinarily significant – that such poets as Shelley and Petőfi would not have even understood this question (while János Arany understood it very well). But, their lack of understanding would not spring from any lack of consciousness; rather, on the contrary, it expresses a higher degree of consciousness: their firm belief in the historical and social purpose of poetry.

Their successors, in turn, in later and more problematic times, clearly respond to this question. Ady, when Lajos Hatvany<sup>18</sup> made demands on him

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16. Goethe's play, *Torquato Tasso* (1790), centres on the figure of the Renaissance-poet Tasso and his struggles with creation and madness.

17. Henrik Ibsen's late play, *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), was subtitled 'A Dramatic Epilogue in Three Acts'. The play deals with an allegorical journey into the mountains by an ageing sculptor, his young wife, his former model, and a bear-hunter.

18. Lajos Hatvany (1880–1961) was a left-liberal writer and critic who published several important articles, books, and documents related to Ady's life and work.

based on the Flaubert tradition (which is a part of the lineage begun by Goethe sketched above), rejected them in his poem, 'Hunn's New Legend':<sup>19</sup>

I shoved away the overweening grace,  
Not to be wizard I came, but as all.

And, likewise, he revealed who this 'all' is:

Councils I drummed up, if I pleased  
And ordered to the armies' head  
Loud Dózsa and quick Jacques Bonhomme.<sup>20</sup>

Precisely at this point, Attila József makes the Ady legacy completely his own. In his memorial-verse about Ady, he expresses beautifully who is this 'all', in whose name Ady, with such proud pathos, rejected the whole Flaubertian problematic of modern art:

His verse is law and in its sweet rhythm  
a stone drops and the castle's window rattles.<sup>21</sup>

And because it is thus, Attila József can justifiably ask – varying this same Ady-esque pathos in his own way – in the first lines of 'Ars poetica' (from 1937):

I am a poet – what interest  
should I have in poetry itself?

And, to this effect, later, he speaks of poetry and his own poetic calling:

I don't close my quarrelsome mouth,  
to knowledge I make complaint.  
At me this century looks and takes my side:  
of me the peasant thinks and ploughs;  
the worker's body senses me  
between two rigid movements;  
at evening the youngster waits for me  
before the cinema, poorly dressed.

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19. See note 15.

20. Ady refers to two figures of early revolutionary populism: György Dózsa (1470–1514) led a peasant-revolt against the nobility in Transylvania; his defeat and execution by torture on a heated iron-seat became a symbol of martyrdom for the Hungarian Left and represented a key event in the entrenchment of feudal relations in Hungarian Central Europe. Jacques Bonhomme was the name given by medieval chronicler Jean Froissart to Guillaume Caillet (or Carle), leader of the 'Grand Jacquerie' peasant-uprising in 1358.

21. From Attila József, 'Ady Emlékezete [In Memory of Ady]', 1930.

And where villains gather in camps  
 to attack my poems' ranks,  
 brotherly tanks begin to rattle  
 out in all directions rhymes.

With all this, poetry, the century-long, problematic homelessness of poetry in capitalist society, receives a positive, uncompromising response, redeeming poetry's poetic essence: precisely in the poetry of the party, and only there. The poet of the party is here a forerunner, a far-advanced outpost of what true, definitive, popular liberation will bring to pass: the end of the problematic status and tragic conflict of all poetry and art, which, in the final account, always originated in the complex of social problems.

## V

Our considerations are not headed towards an idyll or a 'happy-end'. The end of the problematic status sketched above by no means suggests that poetry of the party has now already escaped from everything problematic. In the interest of finding the proper perspective, let us now turn back to our earlier assertions that the poet of the party emerged earlier than modern, organised parties; that there were a number of great 'party'-poets (from Shelley to Heine through Ady) who did not belong to parties, who could not have belonged to parties, because those parties to which they were destined historically as poets had not been brought into existence by history. This was the objective tragedy of Petőfi, and, for Heine and Ady, this tragedy also became subjectively conscious.

Yet, if now the party already is in place, if the party and the poet of the party find each other, still the relation is in no way problem-free. This has reasons that are deep-seated and which go to the essence of society and poetry. Crude, modern, bourgeois individualism vulgarly simplifies the question when it fixes the 'sanctity' of the individual and particularly of the poetic individual in opposition to the party-machinery, in which every person can only play the role of some kind of little wheel or gear.

We are not even talking here about the great world-historical individuals, starting with Cromwell and Marat and going up to Lenin and Stalin, for whom individuality and world-historical mission (thus: party-function) are brought into such unity that both attain a new and example-setting classicism in this higher synthesis. But, also on a much lower level, the situation is such that crude individualism is unable to comprehend the productive, mutual

influence between individual and task. It is unable to comprehend what an effect on the individual it can have, how facilitating and developing it can be, how it impels him upward and brings forth new capacities, to subordinate himself to a great task, to see a great task as the central question of his own individual life.

This question, although often conflictual, can be resolved without problem in the case of ordinary people and by great political leaders, in fact, is resolved without problem. For political leaders, the circle of individual life and the circle of the social life of the age are concentric, and the scale of political genius lies in the degree to which the radius of the individual circle reaches the social circle. For a notable percentage of ordinary people, the centres of the two circles usually do not coincide; the problematic or problem-free character of their political life is determined by the extent to which the two circles overlap. Nevertheless, there is, for the poet, however much he is a genuine poet of the party, always a certain problematic situation in his deepest spiritual structure and its inner workings. Without wanting to overstrain the comparison, one might say that for the poet, the two centrepieces never completely coincide. But, if he is genuinely a poet of the party, the social circle's centrepiece always forms part of the individual circle of the poet's life and work, in fact lying close to the individual centrepiece. Setting aside this image, let us now look a little more closely at the problematic situations that follow from it.

The theoretically least necessary conflict in practice occurs the most often: the collisions of poetry with the sectarian mentality that almost always exists in parties and not infrequently comes to dominate them. The sectarian mentality recognises only the poster-poet as a poet of the party; it declares every divergence in thinking as being against the party. Judgements that are downright comical – at least when viewed from a certain historical distance – about past and present great poets of the party, can result from this mentality. But, that which appears merely grotesque when viewed from a certain distance can be the wellspring of tragic conflicts in the present. The roots of the conflict, however, point still deeper: the true poet of the party is always the singer of the party's great, national, humanistic, world-historical vocation. And since, through the sectarian mentality – and in sectarian party-practice as well – precisely this feeling of vocation in the party pales, unceasing conflicts necessarily arise. Whereas in contrast, when the party, overcoming its sectarian mentality, discovers itself and its calling, this conflict also ceases.

Yet, as we illustrated in the comparison above, in the party-poet's development individuality as such plays a role qualitatively different from that with ordinary people. On his individual development and on the structure of his individuality depend where, in what, how broadly, and how deeply he connects with the party's objectives, principles, and practice. The self-training of



the poet, the productive, mutual influence of poet and party can do a great deal in this regard, but not everything. The poet's character – as the source of every truly good poetry – here plays a role that is neither eliminable nor, even in a decisive way, significantly alterable.

Above all: never has the life-work of even the truly great poet of the party exhausted itself in party-poetry, however broadly conceived. Petőfi, according to our definition, was a most genuine poet of the party. And, in his whole short life, there was certainly no such period in which he focused on party-poetry so much as during the crisis-periods of the 1848 Revolution. Yet, precisely at this time, he posed himself the question: 'What will you still sing, meek poets?' But, he posed this question, the question of the justification of the subjective lyric, independently of politics, in order to answer with a determined affirmation:

On its own the song rises from our hearts,  
If grief or fancy touched it,  
The song rises, as rise in the wind  
The broken blossoms of the rose.

Let us sing, my companions, let louder  
Sound than ever the lute, let there  
Be mixed in this earthy, turbulent noise  
One or two pure heavenly voices!

Half the world has tumbled into ruin...bleak  
Vision, which grieves the eyes and heart!  
So now let fall to the cold ruins  
Our song and spirit like green ivy!<sup>22</sup>

Of course, here, with Petőfi, despite the loud proclamation, there is also no mere juxtaposition of individual and political lyrics. We see that, even in the proclamation itself, the individual lyric bends back in the direction of public concerns. And it is common knowledge how intensively Petőfi's political, partisan temperament was the undercoat of his most subjective, most individual lyrics: let us consider only how deeply and poetically the landscapes of the Alföld<sup>23</sup> in his poetry are related to his revolutionary longing and demand for freedom. In fact, it would be a truly interesting, rewarding, and instructive exercise to trace back the landscapes of the nineteenth-century lyric to

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22. From Sándor Petőfi, 'Mit Daloltak Még Ti, Jámbor Költők? [September 1848; What Will You Still Sing, Meek Poets?]'.

23. Alföld: the Great Hungarian Plain, extending over Western Hungary into parts of Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Romania.

their political and social keynote; many connections that until now have remained unnoticed would come to light. Now we can only allude to Attila József's exceptionally powerful transformation of purely individual mood into public and political matters and vice versa, even if this transformation does not always receive such verbally expressed emphasis as in some of his poems ('Rain', 'Dead Country', and so on). In Attila József, landscapes can also incite rebellion; indeed, do, in fact, incite rebellion.

But here even more is at issue. The party – necessarily and correctly – on the one hand, reaches into all the prosaic questions of practical life, seeking in them that link in the chain which, when grasped, will really set in motion in daily life its national and world-historical objectives. On the other hand, in the midst of the daily (though often lasting years) unfavourable turn of events, hesitations, crises, and apparent hopelessness, it steadfastly holds its course towards a better future. The poet of the party who – to the same degree and with equal necessity – is unable to detach himself from his individual and immediately experienced world is, on the one hand, only rarely inspired by the 'links in the chain' of daily political life, even if, objectively speaking, these are very important and indispensable. (Of course, such occasions, too, can give rise to truly great poems, especially in Petőfi; for instance, his poem 'Hang All the Kings!')<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the poet is unable with his individual fate or his individual experiences to keep to, and follow, that firm march of world-history, that path measured in its logic, with implacable faith, the raising and maintaining of which is such an important vocation and interest of the party, precisely in the most difficult times.

The individual can fall into despair, the individual can collapse under the weight of these blows, and if he is a true poet, even if he is a poet of the party, then he needs to give voice to this lack of any individual way out. This despair's voice begins to speak with moving sincerity in the last poem of Attila József:

Why bite with milk tooth into stone?  
 Why hurry if you fell behind?  
 Why dream if not at night?  
 Say, finally, what was missing?<sup>25</sup>

Lenin, the great party-leader, continuously emphasised that there is no situation without a way out; but this is only in reference to the social activity of nations, classes, and parties. And the individual, the poet, even if he is a poet

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24. Petőfi, 'Akasszátok fel a királyokat!' (December 1848).

25. From Attila József, 'Karóval jöttél... [You Came with a Stake]', 1937.

of the party, may – indeed, must – also be the singer of his own life's lack of a way out. To the poet's freedom belongs the freedom of despair. This is an old poetic tradition, and in great cases it stands in close relation to the poet's social vocation. It is significant and interesting that when Goethe's Werther is arguing for his right to commit suicide as the human right of the individual, he uses the analogy that this is as much a sacred right of the individual as the oppressed people's revolutionary breaking of their chains.

Yet, there is still another essential aspect of this question. As clear-sighted and famously sober a revolutionary thinker as Lenin said that it is often the duty of the revolutionary – to dream.<sup>26</sup> This dream is the serious belief that the distant perspective will be attained one day, and the revolutionary has to dream so that he does not lose sight of the great distant goals on the twisting road of everyday life. We emphasised that the poet's relation to the dialectical unity of everyday life and the world-historical objective was essentially different from that of the great political leader. Yet, here, where – in the sphere of superficial spiritual manifestations – the opposition is apparently greatest, there are tendencies of convergence between them as well. Precisely this capacity for experience, which casts the poet towards despair in situations which offer no individual way out, holds in it the capacity to envision such distant perspectives and to make tangible in poetic visions that which the future brings to pass, but which, for the average person, is inaccessible. Of that great mirrorer of society, Balzac, Marx said that in his creations of types he was prophetic, that he envisioned and depicted such figures as were, in his time, only in a germinal state, and which only in a later period truly emerged as types. We Hungarians lived through the occurrence of Endre Ady's many prophecies.

From all this, I believe, the problematic relation of the party and the poet of the party becomes visible. Is this problematic situation insoluble? I think not. Only, there is, as a consequence, a totally special relation between the party and the poet of the party. Formulating it summarily: the poet of the party is never a leader or a front-line soldier, but, rather, a *partisan* behind the lines. Namely, if he is a true poet of the party, he is in deep consonance with the party's historical vocation, with the great strategic line indicated by the party. Inside this framework, however, he must be able, with his individual means and upon his own responsibility, to speak freely. This does not mean anarchy, or an arbitrary relation, but simply a proper recognition and appropriate

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26. For example, in his chapter on the plan for an all-Russian newspaper in *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin engages in a rather ironic discussion of what sort of 'dreaming' the Social-Democratic movement needs to do with greater frequency.

practical application of the correct ways in which party-activity and the essential characteristics of the poet of the party are related to one another.

The great leaders of the workers' movement saw precisely, and employed carefully, this recognition. Let us consider Marx's relation to Freiligrath, Heine, and Herwegh, or think of Lenin's relation to Gorky. This relation never demanded of the poet adaptation to everyday necessities: lovingly and with understanding forgiveness, they acknowledged the poet's so-called vacillations. This, however, does not imply anything unprincipled. There was such an inner, understanding relation between leader and partisan only as long as the partisan's individual actions in fact were moving along the world-historical, strategic route of the party. When Freiligrath disloyally turned away from the revolutionary democracy of 1848, when in his development he began that period that led during the War of 1870 to poetry in the 'Hurrah Germany!' style,<sup>27</sup> Marx coldly and sharply broke with him. Similar conflicts, even if never leading to a split, broke out between Lenin and Gorky more than once.

We believe that here is the place that we should touch on an unpopular problem, a question often misunderstood by intellectuals: party-discipline. Most of the misunderstandings spring from the fact that modern, anarchistic subjectivism, absorbed in moods and caprices, hardly recognises and often denies – even in private life – loyalty. Loyalty is an essential relation to, and adherence to, the essence, even if the momentary manifestations of life appear to contradict it. In today's bourgeois mentality, this feeling has been so weakened, almost to the point of disappearance, that in bourgeois literature, it can, in most cases, only feature in kitschy or pathological ways. Party-discipline, on the other hand, is a higher, more abstract level of loyalty, the loyalty of the public person: a deep convergence of world-view with some historically given tendency, and thus, loyalty, even when there is no complete agreement

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27. Lukács is referring to Ferdinand Freiligrath's poem of July 1870, 'Hurrah, Germania!' of which the following verse gives a flavour:

Hurrah! thou proud and lovely dame,  
 Hurrah, my German land!  
 As o'er thy river bends thy frame  
 How boldly dost thou stand!  
 How flashes back thy swift-drawn blade  
 The fierce rays of July,  
 As wrathful, in defence arrayed,  
 The foe thou dost defy!  
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!  
 Hurrah, Germania!

See Freiligrath 1870.

on the questions of the moment. It is inconceivable why this loyalty should be an obstacle to the poet's individual and artistic development. All the less so, since, as we have already emphasised several times, it is precisely in the truly great poet of the party that the party's world-historical vocation lives most vividly, with visionary and prophetic plasticity.

Of course, if a sectarian bureaucrat poses the question of party-discipline, if, in this way, he loses the connection of party-discipline to the party's decisive world-historical and national vocation, if he sharply invokes questions of party-discipline even in these superficial, trivial questions, which in this way become questions of blind discipline – then this is another matter, not a true relation between party and the poet of the party, but rather its sectarian deformation.

The true question of this connection is as we sketched it earlier: on the one side is the poet of the party, as the partisan loyal to the great historical task yet acting individually in relation to it; on the other side is Marx's and Lenin's fusing of steadfastness in principle and tactful understanding into an organic unity. If the problem of the relation of party and the poet of the party is thus correctly posed, then it is completely soluble, even if often through conflict. And only thus, through the relation to the party, can the poet, as poet, attain to a higher level. Only thus does the collectively waged battle for common goals, together with the best of the working people, cultivate the best in the poet: that high degree of poetic calling and consciousness, of which we have already spoken several times. The problems of which we have spoken also still remain problems. Yet, for the poet of the party who relies on the party and who – like Antaeus – finds his footing in it, the possibilities for development are completely different from those of the first pioneers of this type, who were forced to do without a party.

It is not by chance that this discussion of principles is taking place at the Hungarian Communist Party's memorial celebration of Attila József. One cannot understand Attila József as a poet without a serious clarification of his character as a poet of the party. If we Communists, as a party that demands and builds Hungarian democracy with grim seriousness and without compromise, claim Attila József as one of our own, then we can and must do this from two standpoints. On the one hand, the highest point achieved by our movement up until now on that path which the old movement seeking liberation set out upon; from this peak it is clearly visible what Petőfi and Ady wanted and what they attained. – And Attila József, as a truly great poet, is, up to the present moment, the last great inheritor of this developmental lineage. But on the other hand, in a closer, more specialised sense as well, Attila József belongs to us: because he loved what we love and hated what we hate,

and what hurt him also hurts us. The truest and deepest feelings, the most elevated desires of the Hungarian working class, peasantry, and progressive intelligentsia, suffering under the Horthy régime, were given voice in his poems. He was ours while he lived, and he remains ours in his immortality as well.

December 1945

## Chapter Eight

### **Free or Directed Art?**

This question nowadays comes up in all sorts of ways as a topical and, especially, as a 'delicate' question. Precisely because it is a delicate question, we are not free to turn aside from it; we must give it an open and resolute response. Yet, if we seek ways towards a solution on the level of today's conventional ways of posing the question and offering answers – as with all of the period's important issues – we will not escape from the labyrinth of false dilemmas. Today's most widespread false dilemma goes like this:

On the one hand, it is said that art and literature are exclusively propaganda (possibly with this caveat, that if it is propaganda, it has its own particular means). The sole task of art is to take a position in the battles of the period, of society, of the class-struggle, assisting in the social victory of a particular tendency or in the solution of some sort of social issue. Whatever exceeds this objective is already 'art for art's sake', 'the ivory-tower', and such like, and, as such, unconditionally to be rejected. Upton Sinclair is the significant representative of this tendency on an international scale.

On the other hand, it is heralded that art and literature are exclusively ends in themselves. They have nothing to do with what happens in society. Indeed, not only are they independent of immediate social struggles and immediate social problems, they neither are, in any way, related to the great issues of history. The artist is bound by no rules, either of form or content; he is independent of any genuine, or even

merely nominal, morality, independent of any thought, humanity, depth. The personality of the artist – more precisely, his exact momentary mood in the given moment of creation – is the ultimate principle of art. The sole object and measure of art is adequately to express the complete, free realisation of this mood, its totally free, playful development, consciously through merely superficial and emotional means. The *Song of Kornél Esti*<sup>1</sup> precisely speaks about that which –

*You should not say this or that,  
nor true nor false...*

But is it true that we have no other choices than the aesthetics of Upton Sinclair or Kornél Esti?

## I

To the questions ‘Where do we stand?’ and ‘Whither are we going?’, we can only receive a concrete and sensible answer if we know: ‘From whence have we come?’ ‘How did this issue itself come into being?’ Because we relate in completely different ways to questions connected with permanent features of human existence (we must work in order to produce for ourselves the conditions of our being) and to those that come into being through factors contemporary in some historical plane determined by the evolution of society.<sup>2</sup> Of course, every period – and especially every period’s view of art – has an inclination to absolutise its own comportment to the world, seeing it as the finally discovered, definitive way of being: *the* human, or *the* artistic, one. This standpoint characterises the representative of both sides of the false dilemma discussed above.

In contrast to this, what is the truth? If we try – as a thought-experiment – to imagine what Aeschylus or Giotto would say about this dilemma, it occurs to us that we would not even be able to explain to them what is at issue, here.

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1. ‘The Song of Esti Kornél’ is a poem by the Hungarian poet and novelist Dézső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), who also created a set of witty and fantastic stories centred on his character Esti Kornél, a trickster, kleptomaniac *homo aestheticus*, who bears some distinct resemblances to the author (with whom he also collaborates to write the works bearing his name).

2. Lukács’s formulation, here, is rather condensed, but he is distinguishing between long-term organic factors of development, which pose one set of historical questions, and conjunctural factors that emerge at particular moments to pose another set of issues of a different nature and import. His point with respect to the politics of art will be to understand the dialectical distinction and intertwining of these two frameworks for thinking about the historicity of social and cultural phenomena.



This is not accidental. Because – far beyond art and views about art – it is precisely in the decisive factors and forms of life, and hence, too, in the conceptions that express these, that this very evolution is accomplished, which brings about fundamental, qualitative, structural changes in the historical process.

In the first instance, these refer to the conception of freedom itself. We must explicate this conception, if only in passing, so that in this central issue of our theme, we avoid employing terms that can be interpreted in the most divergent ways. The consequences of such a lack of clarification would be the ceaseless parallel monologues of the disputants, rather than productive dialogue: arguments with different fundamental points of departures that do not even manage to confront one another polemically. It is, thus, necessary to give a short historical sketch of how freedom has been imagined.

To summarise briefly: in the conception of freedom in antiquity, emphasis on the concrete preconditions of human freedom plays the decisive role; the moral ideal of antiquity is the all-sidedly harmonious person, equally free both inwardly and outwardly. From this, on the one hand, followed the demand for a free society, in which freedom could be realised in the active relations between persons; in the eyes of antiquity, freedom is, in the first instance, the freedom of the citizen [*citoyen*]. And on the other hand, also entailed was the achievement of human comportments through education, self-discipline, and so on, that could make the individual actually capable of living in freedom, of living up to the obligations that accompany freedom. There is a most intimate relation between this and the – as is often said – intellectualist aspect of the ancient conception of freedom. However different the ancient ethics were in terms of their intentions and methods, they always shared one common thread: by freedom (that is, freedom of the individual), they understood dominance exercised over the instincts of ancient man; this is the fundamental principle of Epicurus's moral theory as well.

Thus, speaking summarily, we could say that it was the deepest conviction of antiquity that the idea of freedom was a social idea, that the person can only really be free in a free society. When the individual is forced to live under unfavourable historical conditions, in a society that does not establish freedom, when freedom is destroyed, inner freedom does not only mean that the individual strives to become independent – as much as possible – from the demands of tyranny. Rather, it also means striving to surpass, in the organisation of one's inner life, those constraints that the individual's mere physical existence, the dominance of his instincts, moods, feelings and passions imply for the innermost moral necessities of his life.

The morality built upon this aspect of the ancient concept of freedom is, thus, always concrete: it is founded on the concrete recognition of the

complete set of conditions, complicated interactions, and intensifications of free existence and free, inner and outer activity. General rules and precepts are to raise these concrete relations to prominence, namely in the direction of realising this concreteness and human wholeness. It is not by chance that in ancient morals – not just in Aristotle's – the true mean found between the extremes plays the decisive role. Nor is it accidental that for this morality, bringing to the fore the social point of view never meant the suppression of individuality, while, at the same time, the moral governance of ideas and knowledge never passed over into asceticism.

Our task, here, cannot be even just to sketch a history of morals. We spoke in such detail about antiquity in order to emphasise sharply enough the aspects of today's conception of freedom that are tied to its age and that have come into existence under determinate social conditions. The decisive basis of this determinateness is the development of capitalist society; the emergence of such states, laws, and moralities that correspond to this degree of development. This new society, however, as is well known, does not grow directly out of antiquity, but, rather, from the dissolution of feudalism, upon feudalism's ruins, from its collapse. From the point of view of our problem, this means that the new morality – although purely ideologically, precisely in the period of revolution, it was under the influence of antiquity – realises itself through the forcing apart and shattering of feudal bonds in social reality. In the process of this struggle, however, a radically new conception of freedom emerges, in consequence of the new connections between individual and society that the capitalist system of production creates.

For feudal society, the person always featured as a member of some community (an order, guild, and such like); these communities alone determined his rights and obligations. More pointedly, one might say that feudal society did not recognise at all the concept of freedom (in either the ancient or the modern sense), but, rather, only positive and negative privileges and duties, according to one's rank. In so far as we can speak about freedom at all, it only regards the soul's moral freedom with respect to its own salvation: the freedom of inner choice between good and bad, and here, too, every content of one's activity is prescribed by the society of orders. (The purely inner morality that thus comes into existence was sucked up through every sort of channel into the morality of capitalist society – especially during the period of this society's decline.)

Objectively, the capitalist system of production – in distinction to all that came before it – strengthens and deepens continuously the dependence of the individual person's destiny on the hidden motivating laws of the whole society; at the same time, however, it lends the individual person (the sub-

ject of commodity-exchange) a degree of surface-level, apparent autonomy unknown to any sort of earlier society. There was commodity-exchange in archaic times and in the Middle-Ages as well, but for commodity-exchange to become the structural determinant of the relations between persons and of their relation to society is a novel situation in history. The capitalist system of production creates precisely this new relation in objective reality, and the revolutions that bring into being the states proper to it codify this structure when they proclaim the 'rights of man'. The morality of the new life subsequently – precisely in so far as it really takes seriously this reality and, thus, brings into existence ideas that should be taken seriously – systematises the new facts of life in theory and practice.

At the peak of the great French Revolution, the 1793 constitution defined private property (the legal precondition for the universality of commodity exchange) and freedom (in a new interpretation: the moral precondition for the universality of commodity exchange) such that the former gave unlimited right to everyone to disposition over his own property, while the latter allowed him complete freedom in so far as his unlimited freedom of activity did not injure others. The most influential philosophy up to the present day, the philosophy of Kant, has rightly been called the philosophical expression of the French Revolution. Whoever thinks back to Kant's moral doctrine will know that its whole method is likewise a formulation in thought of those new social facts that the development of the capitalist system of production brought into existence and that the French Revolution, in the form of fundamental rights of man, established in its constitution.

If we compare this morality together with that of antiquity, we quickly discern the fundamental opposition of the two conceptions of freedom. Ancient morality was determined by the objective structure of society, and the moral laws of the individual's activity were derived from this; modern morality views the individual comportment of the individual person as its exclusive point of departure, and every social category can only achieve moral knowledge in its light. Ancient morality determined freedom in ways concretely and in content appropriate to its goals; modern morality, inasmuch as it takes as its foundation the comportment of the isolated individual, determines freedom abstractly and formally. Ancient morality is positive: it seeks the correct pathways for a real person's real, all-encompassing, inner and outer activity. Modern morality is negative: it establishes the limits of possible activity on the individual on his own, on the monad of capitalist society. In sum: for antiquity, freedom is the highest moral form of the concrete activity of human beings acting together; in capitalist society, freedom shrinks into a spiritual fact, a particular modality of individual comportment.

Yet, in our previous contrast, we confined ourselves only to the period of the great French Revolution, the period in which today's reigning social order was born. At that time, the leaders of valiantly fought struggles to bring this society into existence still nourished in their hearts and minds heroic illusions that from these labour-pains of society, a renewed antiquity would be born, that the springing into life of human and citizen rights would signify the birth of a new human type, the 'citoyen'.<sup>3</sup> (This heroic illusion lent the conceptions of freedom in classical German philosophy their philosophical pathos.)

The destruction of feudal society, however, did not create a new polis, but, rather, a society of generalised commodity-exchange, a society of the world-market that was brought into being through great crises. And here, as we have already emphasised, in the proportion that the real dependence of the individual on economic relations increased – in most cases completely unrecognised by him – the self-consciousness of the atomic monad, closed in on itself, and, seeking the meaning of life exclusively in itself, grew stronger. Georg Simmel, almost a half-century ago, established that though the modern concept of freedom was still methodologically based on Kant, nevertheless, fundamental changes have taken place since him. Kant's individualism is essentially based on the principle of equality, taking its point of departure from men who are in their essence equal (the subjects of commodity-exchange). In the modern person, however, according to Simmel, precisely the purely individual is that which distinguishes one individual person from another, the essential quality. Morality conforms in this direction; and freedom becomes the freedom of individuality, understood in this fashion.

This idea of Simmel, as is well-known, came to dominate the whole mode of thought in the imperialist epoch. The fashionable philosophy of our day, existentialism, only diverges this much from Simmel's view in so far as for it such an individualist conception of personality is still too concrete, too laden with

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3. This argument has an uncomfortable continuity with Lukács's earlier willingness to find in the Soviet constitution of 1936 analogous, epochal traits as those he ascribes here to the Jacobin republic in eighteenth-century France. The September 1936 issue of *Internationale Literatur* carried an excerpt from a lecture by Lukács on 'The New Constitution of the USSR and the Problem of Personality', Lukács 1936, pp. 50–3, along with shorter statements of praise by the writers Boris Pasternak and Karel Capek concerning the draft constitution. Cf. the book by Lukács's friend and fellow aesthete Ernst Fischer, Fischer 1937, published after Stalin's signing of the constitution in December 1936. Fischer's book holds up the new constitution as a sign that a new phase of human history has been entered.

content, exaggeratedly filled with connections to other persons and to society. Existentialist freedom even further atomises the moment of decision in the atomised individual, detaching even the individual qualitative existence of the personality from its own past and future.

With this, the illusion of atomistic existence reaches a peak of its development to date: the concept of freedom becomes completely empty. If freedom only signifies that which individual self-consciousness, on its own, momentarily affirms to be its own, then precisely this abstract generality destroys freedom. For if everything is free, then there is no freedom; if every content – which some isolated individual consciousness sees in itself – can be the content of freedom, then it has changed into an empty phrase. Especially because the development of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also radically severed the individual itself from every moral tradition.

However negative and formal Kant's theory of freedom might have been, its author, as the contemporary of the heroic illusions of the French Revolution and the one who shaped them into ideas, if he spoke about individuality, always considered the dominance of the totality of the individual over the mere data of body and soul and the immediate impulses. (It is another issue whether in Kant this turned in an exaggeratedly ascetic direction.) To a growing extent, the social and intellectual development of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sees the subjugation of the individual and the new freedom not only in every social connection and moral norm, but also in reason and intellect, that is, in those spiritual factors that furnish spiritual life with stability, and individuality with backbone and bearing. According to this conception, freedom more and more signifies the unconstrained character of the moment, of mood, and of instincts left to their own devices. The diabolical caricature of this mode of thought was evident in the 'world-outlook' of Hitler and his followers, which denied the validity of any morality. In Kant, conscience still figured as a coherent, foundational argument, as the embodiment of moral freedom; for the followers of Hitler, conscience was precisely the main obstacle to that which they called freedom, namely the unchecked character of base instincts that have thrown off any constraint. This Hitlerian conception is a devilish mockery; but still, we should never forget that it is a growth into caricature of some of the most famous, avant-garde ideas of the past half-century.

Thus, the social macrocosm, the capitalist system of production, receives moral reflection in the microcosm of its apparent atoms, in the imperialist epoch's conceptions of individuality and freedom. The existentialist doctrine of freedom only offered an expression in thought of a comportment that had already for decades been dominant in life.

## II

If, now, in possession of these experiences we turn towards the question of the freedom of art, we are clear that we cannot simply, without further ado, apply conclusions arrived at on other terrain, especially in the domain of pure theory. This insight, however, is far from implying submission before that modern prejudice according to which general social experiences stand in no relation to the internal questions of art, indeed, as if that which, let us say, leads to ruin in questions of social morality could mean true self-realisation for art. There is a very great inclination to this latter position today, especially when the last question we considered, the unconstrained nature of the instincts as the embodiment of freedom, is the topic of discussion. Yet, here, even the leading elements of modern decadence are equivocal. Nietzsche, whom no one would view as an opponent, in principle, of the modern cult of the instincts, clearly stated that the instinctive life of artists ceaselessly produces in their consciousness in mixtures, the good and bad, the valuable and the worthless, and that precisely the conscious capacity for selection that operates here is what makes the artist.

If, however, it turns out that it is not possible simply to apply the modern philosophical conception of freedom, resting on momentariness, to art, this does not mean that artistic freedom is not a special problem in itself, which one should grasp in its own individuality – although certainly within the framework of general, social and intellectual development.

In this sense we may and must ask: was the artist of old ‘free’? Is ‘freedom’ that which today is designated by this term?

In today’s sense, the artist of old – in the interest of simplicity, we will gather together all the constraints, while knowing that there were fundamental differences between them – was not free; indeed, he did not even know what that is which we today call artistic freedom. The arts of old – in ancient times, in the Middle-Ages, even still in the Renaissance – were a part of collective life, and the artists unhesitatingly drew all the conclusions of this connection. This meant that in their world-view and themes, in their form-giving and language of form, they were under the direction of that society in whose collective life their works belonged. More concretely, their points of departure in world-view, theme, content, and form, came from that class to which they belonged, either through their given world-view or through the convictions they acquired in the course of their life. They could not even imagine it could be any different.

Does this mean complete constraint, complete ‘control’, is a lack of freedom? Not at all. Not even if I pick out the most general and most easily grasped motive, that of world-view and politics. I am not thinking, now, of individual

expression and nuances; this would be a too narrow 'room for manoeuvre' for true art. But society, collective life, of which the process of creation and the work itself constitutes a part, is not a rigid unity standing in one place, not even a procession moving in single file, to which the work could simply connect itself. This unity is the complicated, ceaselessly changing resultant of oppositions, of forces struggling with one another; every factor exists only as one or another element of this mobile unity, and the unity itself exists only as the changing sum of changing struggles. If a work of art comes into being as a significant depiction of the totality or of a significant portion of some totality, then, however extensive its constraints of form and content, that is, the 'directed' nature of its world-view and politics, it is, in principle, impossible that in it the compulsory logic of things, of dialectical reality and the dialectical reflection of it, would not create for ideological freedom a certain 'room for manoeuvre'. More correctly stated, a free work would be demanded precisely so that in the given moment that which is socially necessary could be suitably actualised.

If this goes for the arts as ideology, as an expression of certain social trends, then it is twice as valid for every particular artistic question. Because only in modern theories, only for a notable portion of today's artists, based on the notion of their own creative processes, is art primarily 'expression'. Objectively, it is a particular form of reality's reflection, which, if it is true art, precisely for that reason mirrors reality itself and its movements, the essential features of being, its permanence and transformation. This reflection – once again, if it is matter of genuine art – in most cases is greater and larger, more comprehensive and deeper, richer and more true, than the subjective intention, will, and resolve that called it forth. The great art of the great artist is always freer than he himself believes and feels it, freer than the social conditions of its objective genesis would seem to indicate. Freer precisely because it is more profoundly tied to the essence of reality than the acts manifested in its subjective and objective genesis make it seem.

It is not permissible, however, that this train of thought, though justified, should efface the fundamental difference between the old and the new conceptions of artistic freedom. This difference is objective. The issue is not that the artist of the past did not feel himself to be free, that he did not even feel a need for freedom, whereas for the modern artist, precisely freedom is the fundamental experience of artistic self-consciousness. No, objectively, art is always part of social life. In principle, 'art' without response, art fundamentally incomprehensible by others, art that is purely monologic can only exist in madhouses, just like consistently solipsistic philosophy. The necessity of response, that is, the possibility of response, as the particularity in form and



content of the work of art, is the inseparable criterion and essential trait of every true work of art in every age. The artwork's relation to its own public, that is, to a determinate society or to certain historically determined portions of it, is not something that is added later on, more or less contingently, to the subjectively created and objectively existing work, but, rather, is an integral basis and essential factor both in its genesis and its aesthetic being. This goes equally for the art of old and for new art.

Is there, then, a difference? And if so, in what does it consist? Summarising, it could be said that between the artist of the past and his public there existed an immediate connection, and consequently, also, a vivid, productive mutual interaction between them. Once again, apparently this means the constrained character of art, its 'directed' nature. But only apparently. Because this interaction, along with the standing 'constraints' that accompany this mutual interaction (which today only exists in the relation of drama, stage, and public, if much distorted), means fecundation for the arts, while, at the same time, precisely this constrainedness creates for art the 'room for manoeuvre' in which creative invention and a true grasp of the essential can be realised most freely. Let us consider the whole thematic restriction of the art of the past; let us consider the relation of sculpture to architecture in antiquity and in the Middle-Ages; let us consider the relation of the fresco to architecture; let us consider what an influence the narrative representation of reality had on the transformation of epic forms and the creation of their real style; and so on and so forth. And one must always take into account that the constraint that comes into existence here is not traceable to any question of form or content isolated from one another. In the concrete employment of any constraint, whether its immediate point of departure is formal or thematic, the two will necessarily change into one another. The narrative representation of reality is seemingly a formal constraint, but it so deeply influences the whole construction, structure, editing, character- and plot-development, and so on, that from one moment to the next it becomes content. A superficial view might incline one to conceive of thematic constraints as merely related to content, yet in so far as no theme is simply raw material, but may become fully thematic in the first place only in relation to a determinate world-view, the possibilities grasped in this transformation of the theme are dialectically turned into forces that govern the most profound questions of formation and structure. (The Orestes theme;<sup>4</sup> the Last Supper in Giotto, Leonardo, Tintoretto, and such like).

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4. The Orestes theme: the story of the tragic fate of the house of Atreus, which includes Agamemnon, the leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War. In Aeschylus's trilogy of tragedies, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*, the events lead from Clytemnestra's revenge-murder of the returning Agamemnon, through the



Here, the issue already earlier touched upon returns more concretely. The social reality that creates this constrainedness changes uninterruptedly. This change not only makes possible, as we said above, the 'room for manoeuvre' of artistic freedom, but also commandingly stipulates that, under such relations, only those who have essential things to say about the real changes in society can bring into existence an essential work of art. Because only something essential to be said could be deep and powerful enough to grasp the motive forces of society, often operating only in subterranean ways, and their current changes in such a way that allows further organic and productive development of form and content to occur. In such periods, only through decisively new content can serious changes of form prevail; it is only apparently as a purely formal innovation that Aeschylus introduces the second actor. In truth, it is a matter of the artistic birth of the tragic conflict.

This immediate connection between art and public is almost completely brought to a close by capitalist development. In connection with this issue, once again, it is not in our powers even to sketch the concrete historical process by which this comes about. Perhaps it would best illuminate the situation that arises thus if we quote Goethe's words written to Schiller concerning this question, as modern artistic freedom was beginning to come into existence: 'Unfortunately, we more recent comers are also born as poets by occasion, and we struggle about in this whole genre, without truly knowing what we are up to there; because, if I am not mistaken, the specific determinations should actually come from without, and occasion should determine the talent'.<sup>5</sup> We can see that Goethe felt the loosening, indeed the disappearance, of the old constraints; however, he did not at all see this as a freedom to be affirmed, or the finally achieved discovery of artistic freedom. On the contrary. In this freedom, which social reality forced upon artists, Goethe saw a serious danger and a problematic situation to overcome.

The more perfectly the capitalist system of production flourished, the more boundless became this new freedom. Every thematic constraint ceased; total freedom of invention became truly compulsory. The immediate relations of single genres with their publics, namely, the mutual interaction of a genre's amplitude, structure, and mode of presentation with a determinate, concrete type of receptivity, disappears. Here, too, everything is entrusted to the

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revenge of Agamemnon's children Orestes and Elektra upon Clytemnestra, to the eventual lifting of the hereditary curse on the family through the intervention of the goddess Athena and the establishment of a new order of justice in Athens. Following Aeschylus, Euripedes later gave the Orestes theme another treatment in his own group of tragedies.

5. Goethe 2005, p. 527.

individual invention of the artist; here, too, the artist's new freedom is total. (This connection is only seemingly preserved in drama. Along with the theatre becoming a capitalist enterprise to which the public goes only to be entertained, the theatre, to a great extent, loses its character, which used to concretely and productively influence dramatic form. Theatrical technique becomes independent from drama and becomes a separate, literary industry; while in turn, in the course of the nineteenth century, the drama – to its own detriment – became nearly autonomous: book-drama was born.)

All this means much more than the loosening – or even severance – of the immediate connection and mutual interaction between artist and public. It means that this public becomes anonymous, amorphous, and faceless as well. The artist of old knew precisely to whom he directed his works; the new artist – if we look objectively at art's social function – confronts the abstract market as a producer of goods. His freedom – seemingly – is precisely as unlimited as that of the commodity-producer in general (there is no market without freedom). In reality, objectively, however, he is just as much subject to the rules of the market as any producer of goods in general.

This statement, of course, stands in need of concretisation, so that we do not petrify a general truth into an exaggerated falsehood. To a growing degree, capitalist development turns the connection of every art with its public into a commodity-market. To marshal data, here, would be superfluous. Everyone knows the relation of the movie, newspaper, publication, and similar industries to large capital; everyone knows what the concert-agency signifies on the terrain of music, or the art-dealer to the visual arts. The relation of the artist to his public has not only lost its previous immediacy, but a new, specifically modern mediator has been introduced between them: capital. And, increasingly, extending to the whole of art. The nineteenth century still knew non-capitalist islands in the ocean of capitalism. Experimental theatres, literary presses, periodicals produced by writers, and so on. At the outset, capitalism devoted itself especially to the arts that created objects of true mass-consumption, bad art to an overwhelming extent. Yet, along with the generalisation of capitalism, it subsequently emerged that good art could also be good business; and with the experience that the most oppositional, the most avant-garde art – viewed in the long run – could be a profitable object of speculation, those islands were increasingly submerged. The whole of art was subordinated to capitalism; good and bad, masterpiece and kitsch, classicistic and avant-garde art alike.

This situation determines the character of art's modern freedom, its real content, and along with that, the illusions that necessarily accompany it. We do not wish, here, to analyse at length well-known facts either. Everyone knows how capitalist mass-production brings into being the specifically

modern forms of the most various sorts of kitsch, from the 'refined' best-seller, indeed, even, from 'avant-garde' (or yesterday's avant-gardist) kitsch all the way to the various types of completely assembly-line produced pulp-fiction. Everyone knows how large capital produces here powerful fashions, as irresistibly as it does in the clothing or shoe-industries.

It would, however, be a vulgarising simplification to believe that this situation simply, mechanically, and to a 100-percent degree destroys the freedom of art. Not even to mention that capitalist, large industry – and especially the fashion industry – cannot do without individual initiative, taste, and ideas, and that this is naturally true to a greater extent where art becomes a commodity. For capitalism, art means value precisely as individuality, personality, 'brand'; the more succinctly, the more tangibly, running all the way to affectation, individuality manifests itself in a given case, the greater will be the value for the capitalist. Of course, the 'freedom' that arises and the 'individuality' that realises itself in this way is far from proof that art has truly come into existence here. Indeed, on the contrary. Excessive emphasis on free, artistic invention is characteristic of 'superior', 'distinguished' kitsch in capitalist literature. For decades, in his literary and cultural criticism, Karl Kraus pursued with apt and cutting irony this cult of freedom and personality erected on capitalist foundations.

But, genuine art? The true freedom of the artist? We should not forget this; indeed, we set out this framework as exactly as possible, despite all its sketchiness, precisely so that we might concretise with its help, the real 'room for manoeuvre' of true art in capitalist society. André Gide once stated that any true literature today comes into existence in spite of the age. This is completely true, both formally and with respect to content. This opposition goes much further than just rejecting, either in terms of form or content, the art that is supported by capitalism. It extends, one might say, to the whole system. Great artists have never stood in a more alienated relation to any previously existing social order than they do to capitalism.

Alienated: within this word, we find the whole pathos of modern artistic freedom and all its limitations. This pathos is the pathos of defensive despair. Not only does the commodity-producing and circulating apparatus threaten to engulf true art; not only must true art engage in a ceaseless life-and-death struggle against this apparatus and against the kitsch, pulp, and other sorts of pseudo-art it disseminates in art's name; it also struggles against those life-forms and human contents that summon all of this into being and against those that follow from all of this in consequence. While the artists of old were the children of their age, with naïve self-evidence or with conscious enthusiasm, the majority of modern artists – and precisely the best of them –

view with anger, bitterness, indeed with disgust and hate, the swarming of those of their society who surround them and who want to claim some likeness to them. In this way, artistic freedom is founded on overwrought subjectivity, and freedom is claimed only in its name and on its account. The artistic personality claims for himself the sovereign right to depict that which his inner inspiration dictates and in the manner in which it is dictated. The modern artist's conception of freedom is thus abstract, formal, and negative: it only signifies that no one should meddle in his sovereignty.

This abstractness, this formal and negative aspect defines the limits of modern artistic freedom. These limits are manifested in two directions. At first, the arts are ever more resolutely and exclusively forced inward. More and more spaces of representation and representational form are relinquished, as those with which it is already not worthwhile for art to occupy itself because they have been totally permeated by the irresistible prose of capitalism. Finally, there remains no other 'room for manoeuvre' for artistic freedom than mere inner life, than the work of purely subjective experiences. Their stubbornly arbitrary self-reference – distorted by stubbornness – and self-centredness is a despairing protest against a world in which artistic sovereignty can fulfil itself only in this little corner. (That numerous creative works and manifestos profess this pure subjectivity as having cosmic significance in no way changes this fact in itself.)

With this, sets in the paradoxical situation that the earlier, more constrained, less-consciously sovereign and free art relates much more freely to its age in its criticism of society than the art of the present. The achievement of abstract, negative, formal freedom came at the price of relinquishing concrete freedom; in favour of subjective freedom, modern art gave up the conquest of objective reality.

This contradiction appears to us even more clearly if we more concretely compare the relation of subjective-artistic sovereignty with those social circumstances among which it is manifest in reality. This is the second phase of the objective lack of constraint upon subjective freedom. The retreat within, the seemingly radical rejection of the capitalistic external world, which rejection exists only in the subjective imagination, is the most revolutionary gesture that is possible against an incomprehensible, anti-artistic external world. And in this gesture has lived, and for many artists still lives, deeply experienced pathos and stubborn, uncompromising will. The question is only: what is the objective worth and value of this gesture? Or, even more concretely: how does that rejected, condemned, despised object, the capitalist, external world, relate to this gesture?

Viewing this relation from a historical perspective, the tragic paradox presents itself that the capitalist, external world is quite friendly to the abstract,

subjective freedom of the artist. Because recognising and establishing the fact that, today, capitalist investment and commodity-exchange dominate to an unlimited degree over the arts is far from meaning that capitalism prohibits, represses, or condemns to silence all art that does not immediately serve its immediate profit-interests, or that serves these interests only mediately. Not even to mention that, under certain circumstances, even the most critical realism could be good business, and there are no such capitalists who would reject a big profit just because its source was Steinbeck or Zola. But, the general, artistic business of bourgeois society is also extraordinarily multi-layered: as we have seen, on occasions it gives the greatest possible 'room for manoeuvre' for artistic individuality and subjective artistic freedom. Only the kitsch produced for the broad, working masses has extraordinarily rigorous prescriptions (Hollywood). In the arts dedicated to consumption by the upper classes, it is no problem at all if the abstractly rebellious spirit sketched above dominates it. This never touches the reigning interests of capitalism; it does so all the less, the more inward and abstract this revolt is.

The freedom thus granted carries extraordinary danger in it from the standpoint of the development of the arts. Taken in itself, the inward turn already implies a turn away from objective social issues. This is only intensified by the – only very rarely explicitly articulated – contract that on this basis comes into being between the artist, who often subjectively acts in good faith, and the capitalist, who mediates vis-à-vis the public. A contract that one must not talk about certain works, or in certain modes and tones; in this given frame, however, the artist can operate with unlimited sovereignty. The word 'contract' sounds an unpleasant note, and yet, we hardly believe that we need to illustrate it with examples, it is such a well-known fact. Every experienced writer knows precisely that this or that piece of his writing can be published in which paper, in which journal, by which publishing house, and – let's be honest! – in many cases, more or less expressly, this already influences his choice of themes, even its composition and wording. I do not even mention those few cases, where such explicit or tacit contracts slowly divert individuals from the path of art and steer them towards the production of crude or refined kitsch. For us, Ferenc Molnár is the glaring example of such an effect of capitalist 'freedom' on the arts.

We can thus summarise modern artistic freedom as the subjectively sovereign freedom for the immediate, individual expression of individual, artistic experience. In the majority of cases, it follows from this that – in so far as the material of these experiences are social life and the objective, external world – this material emerges in the manner in which it is immediately manifested in immediate experience. Everyone knows, however, that in this society – least of all in capitalism – immediate experience immediately manifested cannot

be equated with the essence of the social world and its true motive forces. The majority of modern writers have to relinquish the exploration of this essence and these motives if they wish to preserve an abstract freedom of experience and expression in an imperialist world that has become increasingly more reactionary. These writers are forced onto this path by the most divergent motives. Here, we have only sketched out the mutual interaction of art with the economic structure. But, belonging here, as I have already discussed extensively, is the socially-necessary alienation of the artist from public life, as well as the reactionary political developments of recent decades, which gave this inward turn and alienation from society an understandable and often honourable aspect of protest. This protest, we acknowledge again, is often worthy of respect. Yet Dostoyevsky already saw that the subjective experience of mere protest is no proof of superiority either in world-view or artistically; he characterised this sort of incipient individualism as the individualism of 'underground-men'.

But whatever the network and series of causes might be, the fact remains: the highest price was paid for the new freedom of modern art. It relinquished the authentic freedom of genuine art: that the true human world might achieve the deepest, most comprehensive expression among all human manifestations in art. The deep relation and unbreakable fidelity to the objective essence of reality is the truly objective freedom of art; objective, because in most cases it is greater than the artist himself realises, thinks, or wants. Modern development displaces art from this main line of artistic freedom. The artist's protesting, inward turn represents subjective opposition to the anti-artistic tendencies of the period and of society, yet, objectively, it accelerates and deepens the process created by external circumstances. 'Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light', G.K. Chesterton wrote.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed it is the worst, because it distorts both outer and inner reality. In particular – and this is quite essential – this distortion is all the more powerful the more deeply established the inward turn and the more thoroughly in its immersion it takes on explicit aspects of a world-view. This followed immediately from the outset of modern development. Not long after Goethe, in anticipation, had indicated the general disadvantageous effects of the social transformation on the arts, Tieck, the representative poet of the first generation of German romantics, sung with hymnic rapture the significance of the inward turn for his world-view:

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6. Chesterton 2007, p. 68.

Beings are because we thought them,  
 In the dim distance lies the world,  
 There falls into its dark shafts  
 A glimmer we have brought along.  
 Why does it not fall to ruin, to waste?  
 We are the destiny that keeps it in place!

...What to me matter forms, whose weak  
 Counter-gleam I brought forth myself?  
 May virtue and vice be wedded!  
 They are only shadows upon clouds of mist!  
 Light falls from me into the obscure night.  
 Virtue is only because I thought it.<sup>7</sup>

It is hard to surpass this glorification of an inward turn into a world-view. At the end of the last century and in our century, artistic individualism, accordingly in many respects, just varied what in romanticism, as a perspective, attained clear formulation. Yet, there is a difference and it is not an inessential one: in nascent romanticism, the illusion still inhered that this subjectivism in world-view and inward turn of principle would be a motivating force in the artistic conquest of the world. Already the artistic development of romanticism itself dispelled this illusion. When, however, this world-view and attitude later, in our day, become predominant, it already carried in itself, if not consciously, the spiritual trace of the earlier defeats and retreats. The tensile force of belief grows weaker, and in parallel with this, the tendency to distort reality becomes stronger, because, though also not consciously, only at this cost was it possible to maintain the illusion that turning inward could possess the significance of redeeming art.

This paradox is most sharply manifested in our day. The most avant-garde tendency of the past decades, surrealism, consciously excluded from itself the objectivity of the outer world in order to save the totally subjective sovereignty of the artist. And in a paradoxical way, this most intense artistic protest against the dehumanising effects of capitalist society in terms of its consequences went hand in hand with the dehumanising of the artist. 'The poet begins where the man ends.' I did not say this; it is Ortega y Gasset's assertion.<sup>8</sup> And he, the enthusiastic follower of this development, goes still further; he shows how this experiential and presentational tendency depends on the nature of the world of things. Because, naturally, even in the most subjective

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7. Ludwig Tieck, 'Der Egoist' (1793).

8. Ortega y Gasset 1956.

and surrealistic art, the external world still exists. But in what way? Ortega y Gasset says that it is not necessary to change the essence of things, it suffices to turn away from evaluating them, 'in order to produce art in which the minor lines of life come to the fore in monumental grandeur'.<sup>9</sup> This is also the poetics of *Esti Kornél*:

What does the diver bring you,  
when he rises from the foam?  
In his hand, sorry mud is what  
he'll dredge you up...

Alas, how shallow is depth,  
and how deep shallowness...

### III

This development is neither linear nor free of crises. Naturally, in this question, we cannot – even sketchily – consider the counter-currents. I have already discussed in detail, in my other writings, how, in the capitalist age, great realism came into existence among individual artists.<sup>10</sup> Here, I will only refer to the cultural and art-criticism of Carlyle, Ruskin, and William Morris, who, in different ways, wanted to restore art's immediate relations, its old bondedness, that is, its old freedom. I allude only to Tolstoy, who named the modern art of his own time, still far from developed as it is today, 'artistic provincialism' in contrast with the universality of earlier art, and who clearly saw that only a renewed, direct connection with the life-forms of the people could offer a way back for true art from the labyrinth of modern life. (I have offered a detailed critique of Tolstoy's aesthetics elsewhere.)<sup>11</sup>

What is the new problem of our day that again makes the question of artistic freedom a burning matter? In consequence of which, the critique of modern artistic freedom is today not just to lament a desperate situation, but, rather, to seek concrete, real ways forward? The new situation is the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union and the struggle for new, people's democracy in the largest part of Europe. These two phenomena differ fundamentally and in

9. Ortega y Gasset 1956.

10. Lukács has particularly in mind two books of essays, written in the Soviet Union during World War II, published originally in communist-exile journals, and republished as books immediately after his return to Budapest in 1945: Lukács 1945a, and Lukács 1946b.

11. In *Great Russian Realists*, Lukács devoted two essays to Tolstoy: 'Tolstoy and the Development of Realism' and 'Tolstoy and Western Literature'.



principle from one another. The great 1917 Revolution in Russia eliminated the capitalist system of production and, in one generation, brought into existence a classless society. The principle of people's democracy – especially here in Hungary, but in many other countries as well – is still at the very outset of its realisation.

Despite this deep-seated and principal difference – precisely on the terrain of culture and art – there are certain points of contact between the problems of people's democracy and those of socialism. The enemy maliciously conjures up equals-signs: it slanders as communism every measure to protect the interests of the workers; it rings the alarm-bells about the repression of art and culture everywhere that the new, people's freedom strives to strike out on its own path; it preaches the defence of democracy every time the defence and strengthening of people's democracy is at issue; and so on.

Here, we will not discuss questions of economy or politics, taken in the narrow sense. Yet, precisely when problems of culture and art come to the forefront, we hit upon a striking fact. As I have already more than once referred to in other connections, on the one hand, fascism grows out of the crisis of the old formal democracy, without which fascism would not have been possible; and on the other hand, the same cultural and artistic crisis was manifested by the imperialist epoch in a whole range of states: in those where the most perfect formal democracy reigned no less than those in which power was in expressly reactionary hands. Thus, it is no accident that in the face of new problems of a new era, the adherents of formal democracy are the most resistant.

With this we have arrived at the question of 'directed' art. The cultural politics of people's democracy – like socialism, the highest form of democracy – necessarily focuses on this issue: to bring the whole culture and, in it, the arts in their entirety once again into direct connection with working people, in the first instance, with the working class and peasantry who have been, previously, almost completely excluded from culture. Moreover, both passively and actively: to put the people in possession of all of culture's previously achieved, valuable accomplishments, to raise the people up so that they are capable of receiving these cultural gains. At the same time, however, also to create a culture that can truly, heart and soul, be the people's possession, in which they would recognise themselves, about which they would honestly feel that it belongs to them. From this cultural programme arises – for its friends as well as for its opponents – the false slogan of directed art.

This – extended – philosophical and historical exposition was needed to make it clear for ourselves that this is a matter of a false slogan, that we see that it is a false dilemma when, from whichever side, we are set down at the crossroads of selecting between Upton Sinclair and Kornél Esti. We should

not deny that both points of view have a decent number of not unweighty adherents. There exists a tendency that demands of art that it should now occupy itself exclusively with everyday issues of construction, and that its whole thematics should derive from that, and that its mode of presentation should be such that the simplest peasant and the most unschooled worker would find it immediately understandable and enjoyable at first read. On the other hand, there exists a tendency, especially among artists, that says: fine, bring the people into connection with art if you like, but art as it is and artists as they are; you have to raise up the people so that they grasp art as it is; if this does not succeed, then the people have failed the test; then it has become clear, as the leading thinkers of the previous century always asserted, that culture has an aristocratic character in principle. Afterwards, the final consequence is drawn in a variety of ways. There are those who also draw political conclusions from this against democracy, rejecting democracy because of its alleged anti-cultural stance. Then, there are those who are content with the conclusion that everything in people's democracy remains the way it was during Horthy's time;<sup>12</sup> that is, those artists who would learn nothing new, striving only for the immanent perfection of art, remain equally lonely as under the reaction; and indeed their situation in democracy has become worse because that cultured stratum that they used to rely on at that time has been eliminated or has lost its old significance. Of course, I am now more sharply formulating each standpoint than they are typically – even in private discussions – manifested.

What, in truth, is then behind the false slogan of directed art? If we seek to concretise the cultural politics of people's democracy, outlined above, then we encounter the aspiration to attempt to persuade artists that it is not only in their own interests, but also in the interest of art as well, if art's development takes its lead from the transformation of the bases of social life, indeed, if precisely here it claims a vanguard-role. But why is this in the interest of art? I believe that my previous explications have already given an answer: because capitalist culture, especially during the imperialist period, has led art into a dead-end street. If artists would relinquish Dostoyevskian 'underground' individualism and subjectivism; if they would strive to reclaim that ancient position of the arts as an important part of public life in which the artist – precisely as a creative producer – is a public person; if they would seize the occasion that now presents itself, to once again establish a direct

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12. The counter-revolutionary period from 1920 to 1944 was overseen politically by Miklós Horthy, the Regent of Hungary. Hungary was nominally a kingdom, but without a king.

connection with their public, this time with the working people – then it will demand sacrifice from them, for, subjectively, it always appears a sacrifice to eliminate a comportment that has been self-evident for a decade, but a sort of sacrifice that both humanly and artistically will be fruitful for them.

The 'direction' that, for a sober mind, is possible under present circumstances cannot go beyond that – very general – guideline. For adherents of people's democracy are convinced that workers' and peasants' lives are full of new possibilities, which can create new, and once again, immediate connections between artist and public, and which are the occasion to bring to an end, the anonymous, amorphous, and faceless character of the capitalist public. And they are especially persuaded that this life, in its own objective economy, pregnant with futurity, can offer more productive terrain and material to the artists than the self-regard of the inwardly turned and self-enclosed ego. But there is, and can be, no one who could set these possibilities, which today are only possibilities and not realities, on the table before the artist, so that he might make immediate use of them. Precisely in this matter, every utopianism and every utopian, anticipatory experiment is dangerous for the future. We stand at the very outset of a great transformation. Every programmatic anticipation bears with it the danger of narrowing unbounded really existing possibilities among which, today, no one can know which will be the most productive in the reality of the future. The danger of every utopianism is that it remains far behind what predictably will come to pass through the flexible use of true possibilities.

The persuasive power of such argumentation, however, is grounded not just on the correctness of the general perspective, but also upon the cultural implications of the general politics of people's democracy. If we discuss how it can re-establish the immediacy between artist and public that capitalist mediation brought to a close, then we are speaking about real social possibilities. It is clear that socialism, in destroying capitalism, naturally eliminates this mediation. The economic politics of people's democracy have a primary and immediately pursued goal, to break the exclusive dominance that monopoly-capital – uniting large landowners and large capitalists – has exercised among us. Land-distribution, the development of co-operatives, the shutting down of pseudo-co-operatives, the nationalisation of the mines and other decisive enterprises create the economic basis of this situation.

Now arises the question: how can this situation be utilised on the terrain of culture so that the problematic status of the arts caused by capitalism could cease, or at least be diminished? The development to date gives proof that this possibility holds out great hope. If, instead of capitalism's exclusive dominance, the social organisations of the workers carry out the role of mediator

between artist and public, then not only can the art-work's mere commodity-character and its mediate, purely profit-oriented aspect come to an end (along with all its disadvantageous consequences). But, also, a new, productive immediate connection between artist and public can come into being, though qualitatively different from any such past immediacy. And the flourishing of peasant-culture, as well as working-class culture, can make this new immediate connection productive to a degree that today is still completely unknown.

It is clear that the social preconditions of this new, immediate connection are today already being prepared. But this, too, is clear: they are only being prepared; objectively as well as subjectively, they are still only possibilities, far from being realities. It is possible to accelerate to a certain degree their fulfilment, but only to a certain degree. Because it is also clear that a large number of artists today, in the way that the recent humanity-killing, reactionary, imperialist capitalism formed them, as well as an equally notable portion of the peasantry and working class, who bore the whole repressive and oppressive weight of this system, are today still incapable of this fructifying, mutual interaction. Both must develop, learn, and revise what has previously been learned in order that this productive mutuality can come into existence.

And, here, emerges – on both sides – the issue of so-called direction. This 'direction' consists in nothing other than clearing away the obstacles to mutual convergence: by social, artistic, and ideological means; by making both sides aware of the problems in a comprehensive way; by the revelation of perspectives; by the production of the material, cultural, educational, ideological, and artistic preconditions of collective labour with the help of the democratic state and the social organisations of the workers. Whoever grasps this issue bureaucratically and prescriptively (it matters little on which party- or class-prescriptions) can cause serious damage, choking off embryonic possibilities yet to come.

In one of my previous lectures, I attempted to determine the poet of the party *par excellence* with the expression 'partisan' in order to indicate that indispensable 'room for manoeuvre', that necessary freedom, without which there can be no poetry of the party.<sup>13</sup> Here, a broader and more comprehensive question is under discussion. The poet of the party is an important type in poetry, but this type is far from exhaustive; anyone who hopes that in the new democratic society only poets of the party will write understands nothing of

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13. 'Poetry of the Party', in this volume.

literature. This cannot be a serious democratic ideal. This ideal's content is not simplification, not reduction to a common denominator, on the contrary: it is richness, manifoldness, polyphony, both in the life's work of the individual artist and in the arts as a whole. If we have just analysed the abnormalities of the developments of recent decades, we have done so overwhelmingly because we are persuaded that precisely here, despite the highly developed nuances of individual affectation, there has set in a narrowing and impoverishment of the decisive issues. In this, we hope – indeed, we know – that the liberation of the people will help. Of course, not automatically, not over people's heads, but, rather, through human decisions and human activities. In no way can 'measures' or 'institutions' or 'direction' establish new developmental tendencies in the arts. Only artists themselves are capable of this, not, of course, independently from the transformation of life and society.

All this is not an internal artistic issue, not a problem of the studio, but rather a matter of the transformation of world-view. The question of artistic freedom, if not simply identifiable with the general, social and philosophical problem of freedom, is, nevertheless, not independent from it. Thus, I would not want with these remarks to persuade the artist to create in a different way than they have created until now. One cannot dictate decisions in questions of style, which depend on the inner dialectic of artistic development. Yet, the artist lives in society and – whether he knows it or not – in mutual interaction with it; the artist – whether he likes it or not – stands on the foundation of a particular world-view and expresses this in his style as well. I have attempted to make conscious this social interaction and to bring these issues of world-view into the artist's world of thought. The whole of social life is in transformation. Changing with it, as in every fundamental, social transformation, are both the form and content of freedom. It would be an illusion if artists were to believe that this does not apply to them; that the reformation of the world should leave no trace precisely in them, its most sensitive material. But, of course, only that transformation can be productive, which occurs from deep conviction, autonomously and freely.

'Freedom', wrote Hegel, 'is nothing other than the recognition of necessity'.<sup>14</sup> Here is – and not in the underground world of the self-enclosed ego – the

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14. Actually, the exact phrasing is from Friedrich Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (1878), in which he attributes this thought to Hegel and puts it together with a quote about necessity that does in fact derive from Hegel's *Logic*. The misattributed quote appeared in the writings of Plekhanov and Lenin, and henceforth became one of the textual commonplaces of the Communist movement.

new, true freedom. It does not depend on artists whether there is crisis in the world. But it does depend on them whether they can put themselves and art productively to work on this. On them depends how much freedom they can discover in unavoidable necessity, and utilise this necessity freely and productively for themselves and for the arts.

April 1947

## Chapter Nine

### Against Old and New Legends

In the 16 February 1947 issue of *Szabad Szó* [*Free Word*], Pál Szabó wrote an article about the misery of the impoverished peasants during the reign of Tisza. The article would have nothing to reproach if the author had not, wholly unexpectedly and without reason, mixed in the name of János Arany with it all. Namely, had he not made a completely arbitrary 'connection', without any relation to the life-work and spirit of Arany, between the oppression and misery of the impoverished peasants and János Arany's supposed indifference to the Hungarian people's sufferings. He writes, 'Just at this time, when they were drumming to drive the crows out of the Radványi Forest, János Arany was plucking his lute there, writing and stating that Benő Bárczi had been found, surely, dead.<sup>1</sup> János clearly knew nothing of the drumming, while the village knew nothing of Benő Bárczi. (What a divided forest there can be in a single wood!)'. And from this 'observation' our author draws the following conclusion: 'János, János, János Arany! May the mould consume your Benő, or gangrene, it is all the same. But the people of the Radványi area – the peasantry of Ugra, Geszt,

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1. Szabó alludes to the opening lines of a well-known ballad by Arany, 'Tetemre Hívás [Call to the Bier]', in which the knight Benő Bárczi is found dead, murdered, under a tree in the Radványi forest. His family demands revenge, testing each other by their reaction to the dead body upon the bier. At last it comes out that his beloved, Abigél, has caused his death by her refusal of his pleas for her affections. Szabó's article thus ironically contrasts the actual injuries that Hungary's peasantry has endured, and which call for real redress, to the literary conceits of the nineteenth-century romantic poet.

Cséffa – demand satisfaction within and beyond their country's bounds for your deceitful song!'<sup>2</sup>

This little article, of course, provoked a response in the press. László Bóka initiated a sharp attack on Pál Szabó in *Haladás* ['Progress'].<sup>3</sup> In his defence of János Arany, Bóka was, without doubt, completely correct. Yet, the debate that ensued did not run along the proper tracks. The 1 March issue of *Free Word* carried a response to Bóka's article,<sup>4</sup> which does not pose the true, principal question of how János Arany's poetry relates to the peasantry, and whether, under the pretext of the 'Radványi Forest', we can oppose Arany's poem to the legitimate interests of the impoverished peasantry; instead, the tone of Bóka's article attempts to re-initiate the old urbanist-populist opposition. Bóka, thus, puts the stamp of an 'ivory-tower' point of view on his defence of János Arany's aesthetics.

It is not our intention, here, to discuss this debate in detail. We would only like to suggest two viewpoints. The first is that this whole issue of János Arany's relation to the problems of peasant life has nothing in common with that of the urbanist-populist division. It is high time to get rid of this opposition definitively; it was always harmful and, in any case, today, has lost its meaning. Those from either side who wish to blow on the embers, to reignite the flames of this conflict poorly serve the interests of Hungarian literary development. On the other hand, however, we must assert that Pál Szabó's article is not just an individual slip, but, rather, one of those symptoms of a – presently only literary – behaviour, which, if we allow it time to develop, can bring about great confusion. But let us also establish immediately that this symptom has nothing to do with the so-called populist tendency. In consequence of his rigid, one-side application of the viewpoint of the poor peasantry, Pál Szabó draws absurd and dangerous conclusions about János Arany. But, neither should we close our eyes to the fact that, in our own literary criticism, not only do we encounter such rigid exaggerations of the viewpoint of the poor peasantry, but also a similarly frigid and one-sided application of the proletarian viewpoint and, likewise, its typical detouring into completely incorrect conclusions. And, we believe that we must take a stand against these tendencies before they grow stronger, before they swell into real currents.

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2. Szabó 1947: p. 8.

3. Bóka 1947: p. 3.

4. Anonymous, 'Törpe elafántcsonttorony [A Dwarf Ivorytower]', *Szabad Szó* 49/51 (1 March 1947), p. 2.



What is at issue, here? The radical revision of Hungarian literary history has become an urgent and unavoidable necessity.<sup>5</sup> The issue around which this revision will revolve is establishing that the central figures of Hungarian literature are the great revolutionary poets: Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady, and Attila József. Consistently carrying through this perspective is an issue of the first order, not just from the point of view of democratic politics and popular education, but also for Hungarian literature itself. It would be quite mistaken to view the ideological debates and the revision of previous ideology as something of secondary importance, to estimate them with the arrogance of the practical politician as only a matter for the literati. If, two years after the liberation, the Hungarian landscape is still full of the Gyula Illyés-sort of 'invisible party-books',<sup>6</sup> if, among a notable portion of the intelligentsia, indifference, lack of understanding, ill-will, or passivity still predominate in the face of the burning questions of democracy, then this is, not least, because of the absence of intellectual re-education and lack of clarity in questions of democratic ideology and literature. To what extent ideology and, together with it, the reconstruction of literature *directly* influence these strata is another question. But, in any case, it is not a decisive question. For, directly or indirectly, without a revision and renewal of consciousness, winning over and enduringly consolidating the people in the spirit of democracy is impossible.

The revision of Hungarian literature is, thus, utterly imperative. The central position of Petőfi, Ady, and Attila József must be established, and this assignation must be grounded aesthetically and in literary-historical terms. We must uncover why, from what social causes, and through what

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5. See, in this volume, 'The Unity of Hungarian Literature' and 'The Revision of Hungarian Literary History'. Lukács also published as a pamphlet, a third text on this subject, not included in this volume: 'The Revision of Literary History and the Teaching of Literature', his lecture and the discussion of it at the 28 October 1948 literary forum of the Pedagogical Union's Instructional and Cultural Department. Cf. Lukács 1948b.

6. In speaking of 'invisible party-books', Lukács may be referring, here to the position the populist poet Gyula Illyés articulated in his February 1939 essay, 'The Writer's Fidelity [Az Író Hűsége]' to which Lukács had earlier responded with his own May 1939 'marginal notes' on Illyés's published diaries of the 1930s, *Magyarok*, polemically entitled 'The Writers' Responsibility' or, more literally, 'The Responsibility of the Clerks' (Lukács 1945b) and thus echoing both Julian Benda and Illyés. In 'The Writer's Fidelity', Illyés had claimed the writer's superiority to everyday-politics, arguing instead that the writer's 'politicising' is dedicated to creating the flawless work of art. 'We are granted our tools not by tactics but by spirit, which staying in one place points out the way... We need only be the faithful ones.' Cf. Illyés 1939. Lukács saw in this withdrawal of the writer's engagement from public matters a symptom of the weakness of democratic ideology among Hungarian literary intellectuals, even among some of the most socially committed such as the left-populist Illyés.

arguments, other contradictory, falsifying evaluations have come into being since 1848 and especially since 1867. But, this whole, essentially correct recognition will remain fruitless, even counterproductive, if in the realisation of correct arguments there arise errors, incorrect proportions and emphases, and *deviations*.

I intentionally employed this latter expression, even though it comes from the terminology of the Communist Party. I used this expression because it quite correctly characterises the present situation, a swerve from the correct orientation that is just beginning and, at this early point, is hardly perceptible. At a moment like this, such swerves appear so insignificant and their practical importance so minimal that sharp criticism against them is taken to be so much hair-splitting. But we know, from several decades of experience, that if people, even well-meaning ones, continue along the path of 'deviation' without being warned by anyone, clashes of principle can arise among those who yesterday were all in one camp, and sooner than even quite practical people might think. It is for this reason that I think that such a question needs to be clarified on a sharp principle, now while the 'deviation' has still not given rise to a true conflict of principles.

Well, then: what is at issue, here? That a number of honourable democrats (who occasionally may also be neophyte Marxists or Marxists in the sectarian tradition) understand setting Petőfi at the centre of Hungarian literary history to mean that it becomes their sacred, democratic duty to disparage the 'reactionary' Dániel Berzsenyi or Zsigmond Kemény and the 'merely liberal' Mihály Vörösmarty or József Eötvös; indeed, as the example above shows, even the peasant János Arany may receive a share of ultra-peasant or ultra-proletarian blows. It is the same situation if they speak of Endre Ady on the one hand, and Mihály Babits or Dezső Kosztolányi on the other.

Against this approach and against this attitude one must take a stern stand, while it is still only the inclination of a few. Why stern, when it is just only an incipient tendency? In the first place, because everything that is asserted here is untrue, both from a socio-political point of view and from an aesthetic perspective. It is not the task of the democratic revision of history and literary history, of a democratic writing of history and literary history, to establish a new falsification of history and a new legend in place of the old. Its task – great, difficult, and one not to be fulfilled immediately – is to disclose the truth with respect to the whole, interconnected development of Hungarian literature and the Hungarian people. This, however, means that democratic history-writing will view Petőfi or Ady as the central figures in the midst of a powerful literary development, in the ranks of great or, at least, significant poets; central characters in the unbroken chain of the life-works of major progressive writers.

No one should have any illusions. This conception will not be realised without intense scholarly debate and serious literary conflicts. And, if we now struggle for the dialectically proper proportions of the democratic standpoint, this standpoint itself will unavoidably occasion misunderstandings and even contrary opinions. Above all, the adherents of the different shades of the old conception will see in this a retreat, or even a capitulation, a surrender of our original standpoint. In itself, this would not be a big problem. Why not give them this satisfaction, if it does not cause other sorts of theoretical and historical confusion? The problem is, however, that it can in fact cause confusions. For, if we consider Berzsenyi or Vörösmarty as great poets, we do this, in large part, with a different motivation and with a different social-historical and literary content than the adherents of the old conceptions (otherwise very divergent from one another). We refer to only a few of the most important perspectives. On the one hand, we are still not inclined to make allowances to the cult of 'pure form': our ideal of the great writer is inseparable from the appropriate poetic expression of the great, progressive currents of mankind and society, the nation and the people. On the other hand, still less do we recognise even the relative justification of those who praise the great Hungarian writers as representative of a 'deep Hungarian' conservatism or of a true Hungarian 'Realpolitik'.

Yet, any polemic can only be valid if it begins from a standpoint that is independent and uninfluenced by these adversaries, if it can establish a proper *tertium datur* in opposition to all preceding false dilemmas. It is the conceptual mistake of every pseudo-radicalism that it unconsciously takes over as its own the false standpoint of its adversary and thus – whether knowingly or not – does not struggle for the establishment of authentic truth, but, rather, tilts at windmills and against phantoms. The genuine János Arany was never an 'aesthete'. Whoever, from an ultra-peasant or ultra-proletarian point of view criticises Arany as an 'aesthete' – alongside other damaging aspects of this standpoint – remains unaware that though he reverses the value-sign, he stands under the influence of a traditional, conservative, even reactionary, Hungarian literary-historical approach, in so far as he does not criticise it from a fundamental conceptual viewpoint.

Our approach to the great writers of the past, our point of view from which we would like to approach these questions did not originate or develop in the context of present-day debates. Thus, they in no way represent any kind of 'tactical turn'. As just one example among many at hand, I cite a few lines from one of my old polemics against László Németh:

It is possible to show the complicated, contradictory aspect of historical development; every development is full of contradictions in class-societies.

The conscious and direct struggle for bourgeois society is, for the most part, progressive and culturally productive. But neither does this exclude that in this progression there might emerge tendencies that collide with the true interests of the people, nor that the – legitimate – opposition manifested against these tendencies might not appear in conservative, even reactionary garb. Every literature has such ideologically reactionary but important writers. The greatness of writers, however, nourishes itself from those legitimately oppositional elements, starting from which they represent, against their reactionary ideology, the true values of the people, the serious tendencies of true progress. Writing of Balzac, I already touched upon the main arguments in this connection in the pages of 'New Voice'. (These essays can be found in my book *Balzac, Stendhal, Zola*.) A serious and concrete, scientific investigation of these relations in the case of, for example, Berzsenyi would be important and useful. One may, however – and László Németh does this – idealise the conservative features, seeking precisely in these poetic greatness, 'deep Hungarianness', 'Hungarian realism'.<sup>7</sup>

These lines, which I picked out to quote from a large number of passages of similar tendency from my previous writings, encompass the struggle not only against conservative and reactionary stylisations and distortions of history, but also against the 'aesthete' legend. If we emphasise *what sort of great progressive content a writer's lifework objectively represents*, we simultaneously take a stand on the one hand against those who disregard these contents and profess the exclusive validity of a formalistic aesthetic dimension, isolated from these contents and thus made bloodless; on the other hand, against those who take the writer's personal, political, and so on positions as the sole or only decisive point of departure, and on the basis of this interpret and evaluate their life-work, which, however – if it is a matter of truly significant writers – objectively diverges a great deal from these positions.

Hegel rightly says that the truth is always discoverable only in the whole, in the totality. From the perspective of our problem, this means that we have no intention, in any way, to neglect the aesthetic dimension, to view it as secondary. It is only that from our point of view, there follow a determination and application of the aesthetic that is completely different from that of the adherents of 'pure form.' Moreover, we do not leave aside the personal, political, and so on positions of the writers either; only, we do not see them as the

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7. The quoted passage appears in 'Ujra és újra: mi a magyar? [Ever Again: What is Hungarian]', Lukács 1940, p. 14.

exclusive key to a proper understanding of their life-work. Exactly on the contrary: here we have to struggle against legends. For example, it is a legend that during the counter-revolutionary period, Dezső Kosztolányi, allegedly just like Mihály Babits, always occupied a purely humanistic position. The period of the *Pardon* column cannot be expunged from Kosztolányi's life.<sup>8</sup> This period indelibly exists, and Kosztolányi himself attempted to give a psychological explanation of it in the introduction and conclusion of *Anna Édes*.<sup>9</sup> Between the conduct of Babits and Kosztolányi, it is precisely here that the difference becomes visible, and a proper, thoroughgoing analysis will also reveal in their works this difference of comportment. But here we confront an aesthetic and literary-historical *problem*, not material for a pamphlet. As sharply as we protest against the Kosztolányi legend, equally so must we oppose every conception that seeks to 'deduce' Kosztolányi's whole life-work and writerly personality from the *Pardon* column. Kosztolányi is a significant poet *despite* having written the *Pardon* column, but we cannot omit this time, this position, this conduct – as features – from his portrait as a writer.

These perspectives, properly oriented and truthful perspectives upon the totality and whole, relate, first and foremost, to the evaluation of past literature. Yet they do not signify immunity, however immensely talented a writer may be, if he opposes the values decisive for the development and edification of democracy. The great French Revolution legitimately executed André Chénier. And every struggling democracy today must do so as well. But, this revolutionary duty does not retroactively influence the evaluation of the past, the scholarly elaboration of literary history. I do not believe that there would be today in France any serious, democratic writer who would not have a true perspective on the life-work of André Chénier.

Up to this point, we have apparently not polemicised with those against whom our article is actually directed. But this is just appearance. For if we do not clarify, ever anew, our conceptual and theoretical position against conservative and reactionary ideologies, it is impossible to eliminate quickly and effectively

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8. From October 1919 until January 1921, Kosztolányi wrote a column entitled *Pardon* for the far-right paper, *Új Nemzedék* ['New Generation']. Trying to keep good relations with both the Right in counter-revolutionary Hungary and his liberal friends in exile in Vienna, Kosztolányi was in an increasingly untenable position, and he was eventually forced off the pages of *Új Nemzedék*.

9. Kosztolányi's novel, *Anna Édes* (1926), presents the tragic fate of a servant-girl in Budapest just following the collapse of the 1919 Council-Republic and the ensuing Romanian occupation, counter-revolutionary repression, and dismemberment of the historic Hungary at Trianon. The clear-sighted, even cynical irony of Kosztolányi's prose masterpiece earned him disapproval from both the Right and the Left. See Kosztolányi 1993.

ultra-peasant and ultra-proletarian 'inclinations'. I repeat: this debate did not originate in the present. And it is far from an exclusively Hungarian question. In the 1930s a similar debate took place among German émigrés. At that time, numerous ultra-proletarian writers appeared who felt obliged to take sides against Schiller in favour of Gottfried August Bürger, with Karl Ludwig Börne against Goethe and Heine,<sup>10</sup> for Georg Forster against the whole German classical age, and such like. If any of my readers are familiar with my book entitled *Goethe and His Age*, they will be able to find in it traces of this literary debate.<sup>11</sup> But, also visible there is that the workerist opposition to Goethe and Schiller can only be won over if we do not confront them with a Goethe and Schiller distorted by conservative literary history and conservative aesthetics, but, rather, with a true, reevaluated, progressive interpretation of them.

It appears that we must also go through these debates. Of course, I know very well, and have many times emphasised, that Hungarian literary development is completely different from the German development. In the German lineage, it had to be explained how it was possible that, say, Goethe and Hegel were central figures in German ideological and literary development when they, nevertheless, did not take a radically demanding position on the question of democratic progress, and, indeed, often opposed democratic development. In Hungarian literature, this question appears much simpler. In the first instance, because our greatest poets, Petőfi, Ady, and Attila József, were also the most consistent representatives of the democratic ideal. This simplicity, however, stands in the closest connection with one of the most complicated problems in Hungarian literature, to which until now no one has been able to offer a satisfactory solution: that the leading genre of Hungarian literature has been lyric poetry, and that neither in the novel nor in drama has Hungarian literature yet succeeded in achieving the world-literary eminence that Hungarian lyric poetry has represented for a century and a half. (Also connected

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10. After his death, Börne was the object of highly critical 'memorial'-text by Heine, in which Heine wittily debunked the posthumous heroising of Börne. However, Heine's mockery was ill-received by the liberal German public that had built up the Börne myth, and rather than cutting Börne down to size, the book seriously damaged the author's own reputation.

11. Lukács 1947 presents essays that Lukács wrote in the Soviet Union between 1934 and 1940. Interestingly, it was given a positive review by Herbert Marcuse: Marcuse 1950, pp. 142–4. Marcuse notes the limits of Lukács's moralising analysis and style, which he characterises as 'petty-bourgeois', but he goes on to conclude with a nod to Lukács, who by 1950 was under intense pressure at home: 'in light of the stupid attacks emanating from Hungary, it must be emphasised that he elucidates a whole dimension in classical literature which the traditional interpretations almost unanimously overlook or distort'.

to this question in the closest way is the fact that independent Hungarian philosophy, significant on a world-scale, does not exist.)

From this situation, two sorts of complications arise. On the one hand, Hungarian literature cannot relinquish trying to develop genres that comprehend the objective, social totality, which means that these efforts, in so far as they wish to connect with Hungarian traditions, must look elsewhere than to the central figures of literary history. On the other hand, the miraculous convergence of lyrical greatness and democratic consistency in the central figures of our literature can easily lead to injustice and misappraisal of great values if we see in them an infallible, schematically applicable measure for every evaluation of literary significance.

Here is the motif that plays an exceptionally important role for today's ultra-radicals. Referring to Petőfi, Ady, and Attila József, they may appear to act in good faith, aesthetically, even when in their statements and evaluations they commit the greatest injustices. But, of course, this is only an occasional aspect of such errors. The true reason must be sought in the fact that a portion of the working strata who began to express its thoughts after the long counter-revolution at first had only a spontaneous, relatively narrow-minded, one might say 'guild'-consciousness: the peasant who was thus situated did not see anything other than peasant-values understood in the narrowest sense, the purview of such a worker almost exclusively confined itself to immediate problems of workers. (And, worst of all: men of letters always emerge who exploit this backwardness of a portion of the workers and peasants; they perpetuate it as a thought, make an ideal of it, instead of pointing out that it is a transitional phase to be surpassed.) We do not wish to discuss, here, how great a danger this guild-like consciousness represents for public life; it is one of the most important ideological obstacles to the deepening of the union of workers and peasants. We will only call to attention how such ultra-peasant and ultra-proletarian tendencies can cause immeasurable damage in the cultural domain, both to peasants and workers. Up to the present, working people were excluded from national cultural life. Now, they are called upon to renew this culture, to bring it to a new flourishing. The working people, however, can only fulfil this task if it can take into its possession the *whole* of previous Hungarian culture, if it can select from it that which points into the future, the elements and directions that will produce future development. Every endeavour that stands in the way of the working people appropriating the whole of Hungarian culture is damaging and dangerous – whether it comes from the Right or from the 'Left'.

We know that this taking possession of culture is no simple problem. The social, historical, and aesthetic re-evaluation of Hungarian literature is a labour

that far exceeds the capacities of even the most brilliant individual person. Only from the common work of the whole ensemble of writers and scholars of democratic persuasion can this re-evaluation come into being, and it will require a long time, even under the most favourable conditions. It demands passionate disagreements in outlook that break out over the concretisation of individual questions. For this reason, polemics, sharp in content but comradely in spirit, are necessary: the attempt to persuade every intelligent and good-willed democrat of the correct line that is necessary, here. These pages are far from attempting to propose solutions. They are intended only to call to attention the dangerous side of certain incipient tendencies. At the same time, they intend to point out that the style of polemics originating in these tendencies (the renewal of the urbanist-populist opposition) can easily roll back our literary development, which has hardly begun, instead of finally taking a step forward towards the solution of these important problems with the help of a friendly but sharp debate between opponents.

March 1947



## Chapter Ten

### The Unity of Hungarian Literature

*This article comprises the lecture I delivered on 26 June 1946 at the Hungarian Writers' Congress in Debrecen. Since problems of great importance arose during the debate, especially in the speeches of Péter Veres and Gyula Illyés, which I reflected upon in detail in my closing remarks the following day, I considered it necessary to work those thoughts as well into my essay (G.L.)<sup>1</sup>*

If we take up the problem of the unity of Hungarian literature, we must dispel misunderstandings and overcome inner resistances. Thus, immediately at the outset, we must firmly state: unity does not mean uniformity. Such a conception of the unity of literature was already approached years ago by Aladár Schöpflin in a debate with János Horváth.<sup>2</sup> Schöpflin

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1. Lukács went to Debrecen to put forward the Communist Party's latest formulation of a united literary front, with greater influence exercised by the Communist position. The essence of the literary-political strategy of the Communists was to attempt to win over the left wing of the 'populist' writers, particularly Gyula Illyés and Péter Veres, while breaking their support for populist writers viewed by the Communists as ideologically untenable, especially László Németh. The responses of Veres and Illyés at the Congress, however, were to attack bourgeois-'urbanist' writing but also to forcefully defend Németh and other populist-literary comrades. In the end, it was Lukács and the MKP that had to make temporary concessions to the populists, in order to keep alive the hope of a desired alliance with their most influential writers. For a more extended account of this Congress, see Standeisky 1987, pp. 59–63.

2. Schöpflin 1921. Schöpflin's essay took as its object of critique János Horváth's pamphlet-essay, Horváth 1921. Horváth lamented the lack of conservative writers of quality and the emergence of an '*elotelen modernség* [unprincipled modernity]' among the publics who supported the new writing of authors such as Endre Ady. Schöpflin responded by noting the degree to which literature had been politicised by conservatism and the autonomy of literary imagination impoverished by the demand that

referred, there, to the unity of French literature, which made it possible for both the right-wing Charles Maurras and the left-wing Anatole France to be members of the Academie;<sup>3</sup> French literature never set progressive, new writing in such exclusive opposition to esteemed traditions as conservatism did in our country, for example, in the case of Ady. It is not important whether we agree with Schöpfung's line of thought in every consideration; we wish only to point out his method and orientation in posing the question. The situation is even clearer if we think of the unity of Russian literature, where the great question of popular liberation unifies the most socially and politically, philosophically and artistically opposed writers. Already the great Russian critic Dobrolyubov saw this unified problematic from Pushkin to Goncharov, and writers of opposed tendency such as Dostoyevsky and Gorky further developed his thought. It is no accident that, on the occasion of the Pushkin jubilee, a number of articles took up this intellectual unity that binds Gorky and today's literature to Pushkin.

But perhaps even more clarifying is the opposed picture, that of German development. Max Weber, the outstanding German sociologist, once said ironically about the method of German scholars that each viewed the terminology of the other like a stranger's toothbrush, which they would not for all the world put in their own mouth.<sup>4</sup> From the other side, Thomas Mann clarified this situation very well when he responded thus to a questionnaire which inquired as to whether Schiller was still alive in German literature: this is a typical German question; it would never occur to a Frenchman even to pose the question of whether Racine was alive. This stands in the closest relation to the fact that in German literature, in nearly every generation, a 'radically new art' comes into being which breaks with every predecessor. Of course, here too, there is a subterranean continuity, but it makes a qualitative difference

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conservative literature serve a narrow, exclusive, propagandistic function since the 1880s. In contrast, Schöpfung argued, the modernising, liberal tendencies that Horváth bemoaned, also gave greater reign to the imaginative work of writing and could receive innovations with tolerance and productive interest.

3. Schöpfung's essay actually does not mention Maurras, as Lukács states, but, rather, Maurras's fellow ultra-right, anti-Dreyfusard, and anti-Semitic counterpart, the novelist and politician, Maurice Barrès (1862–1923).

4. Referring to his borrowing of categories from his fellow (and rival) sociologist Werner Sombart, Max Weber wrote in a note to his 'Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Revolution im Russland [On the Situation of the Bourgeois Revolution in Russia]', (1906): 'Die heutige Schriftsteller-Eitelkeit aber, einer von einem anderen gebrauchten Terminologie gegenüber sich ebenso zu verhalten wie etwa gegenüber seiner Zahnbürste, mache ich nicht mit'. ('I do not share the current vanity of writers of relating to terminology used by others in the way that one would one's toothbrush'.) Cited from Weber 1989, p. 100.

how conscious this continuity is in the literature, among the writers, and in the public as well.

The social basis of this conscious continuity is the development of democracy, or – as in Russia – the struggle for popular liberation.

## I

For this reason, there was unity in Hungarian literature in the reform-era. Of course, not in a mechanically-attuned form; there were autonomous trickles and streams here, which, however, flowed into one great current. In this sense, one can speak of the literary unity of that period from Kazinczy and Berzsenyi to Petőfi. Even if we emphasise sharply, as József Révai has done, in our view correctly, that which distinguishes Petőfi from the reform era, that which in him signifies a higher degree of commitment to popular liberation,<sup>5</sup> the unity of the period's literature still is not shattered. This literature is unified, because it is the growing self-consciousness of a people striving for freedom; because, in its every manifestation, it grapples with real, great problems of this liberation; and because its poetically most significant forms grow out of making advances on these problems.

A major turn sets in only with the 1867 Compromise.<sup>6</sup> For Hungarian literature, the decisive problem was precisely that, as a consequence of the Compromise that came into being in 1867, a whole set of crucial issues became taboo in public life and, thus, also fell outside the thematic reach of literature. These included: the relation to the Habsburgs and to the Triple Alliance, especially Germany; our relations to German culture and politics; the problem of the peasantry and the working class; and the question of nationalities. Official and academic literature was socially constituted in such a way as to canonise complete silence about these most important questions of Hungarian life. It goes without saying that the literature that came into being in this way could only be epigonal. It is highly notable that this epigonal quality was sanctified in the name of the aging János Arany, whereas Arany at this time made numerous attempts to grasp the authentic problems of the new life and to express them poetically.

The epigonal literature separated its development also from those classic writers in whose name it had emerged, and of whom it was – apparently – the follower and heir. In this way, the classics themselves became participants in the break-up of literature: with their greatest values, they stand outside the

5. Révai 1960a, pp. 55–73.

6. The 1867 Compromise founded the 'dual' Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

development of great literature. Pál Gyulai already carried out this separation with Petőfi; we saw this with the relation of the elderly Arany and his epigones; for decades this rendered the poetry of Vörösmarty's final period incomprehensible.<sup>7</sup> If this is how the classics are handled, then it is clear that those significant writers who attempted to depict in literature the great problems of Hungarian life will be excluded from the official literature; we may think of Lajos Tolnai, János Vajda, and such like.

This division of literature was even further deepened by the emergence of Hungarian capitalism and urban life. It reached its peak with the appearance of Endre Ady and the formation of the journal, *Nyugat* ['The West']. (The relation of Ady and *Nyugat* notably clarifies the thesis we advanced at the outset: in the *Nyugat* group there was literary unity, even though between Ady and several *Nyugat* writers there were gaping schisms, politically, philosophically, and literarily as well.)

The counter-revolutionary period carried over this legacy of literary schism, but the disintegration was intensified even further, to the degree that the opposition between a putative reality, the only one officially recognised, and real life itself also grew. Dezső Szabó attempted to produce a unified literary ideology for the process that began in 1919. But the contradictions of this process, along with Dezső Szabó's incorrect method and way of posing the problem, resulted in the necessary failure of his attempt; this excellent writer lived in tragic isolation, both from the Right and from the Left.

Right-wing literature and the official literature of the counter-revolution still more fully broke away from the true development of Hungarian society, from true Hungarian literature, than had the academic literature before the revolution. Fascism succeeded later in seducing a few talented writers, but, even with their help, it was not possible to create in Hungary a serious right-wing literature.

The disintegration was even greater in the oppositional literature because the revolutionary period more clearly threw light on the contradictoriness of Hungarian social life.

The older *Nyugat* lost its previous – even then, very moderate – revolutionary features. Only the struggle for serious literature remained in its programme. In the interest of preserving serious literature, they were inclined to make far-reaching compromises with the elements of counter-revolutionary 'consolidation'. When Albert Berzeviczy extended them an olive-branch, Mihály Babits accepted it and in his response, ignored, in one respect, that the

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7. Lukács is suggesting that the late poems of Vörösmarty are marked by his disappointment in the failure of the independence-struggle, not just by purely 'literary'-stylistic factors.

evaluation of previous literature in *Nyugat* was totally different from that of Berzeviczy; in another respect, he distanced himself from Ady's revolutionary traits, defending him solely as a great poet.<sup>8</sup> The social – and, in consequence of these, literary – oppositions had such deep effects, however, that it was impossible to achieve any equilibrium. The significant writers of *Nyugat* did not sympathise with the counter-revolution. But, even more powerfully than before the Revolution, there arose an ivory-tower here, a conscious pursuit of art for art's sake (which, of course, also includes oppositional elements).

In the young generation influenced by *Nyugat*, these tendencies were even stronger than in those who established them. That portion of the humanistic young generation brought up on *Nyugat* who were discontent with this compromise split off and formed the group around the journal, *Szép Szó* [Beautiful Word]. Thus, the division was further deepened. For the one-sided urbanism of the new humanism and their liberal opposition to the masses sharply distinguished them from the serious oppositional grouping coming into existence.

I cannot characterise populist literature here; I have discussed its virtues and shortcomings in detail in a number of my works before.<sup>9</sup> Here, it is enough to point out that the antagonism between the populist writers and the urbanists today further increases the fragmentation of Hungarian literature.

During the counter-revolutionary period, the literature of the revolutionary working class also emerged. Aside from individual exceptions, this literature developed in an almost completely insular way – in part because of the counter-revolutionary situation, in part as a consequence of the sectarian ideology of a notable portion of the writers – and, everywhere, the disintegration of Hungarian literature only intensified.

To all this should be added, as a new factor, the new Hungarian-language literatures developing autonomously under new circumstances in the neighbouring states; in major part, these stood in sharp antithesis to the official and opportunistic literature of counter-revolutionary Hungary.

This account is far from exhausting the true disintegration that resulted; the collapse into groups was much greater than recounted here; we only highlighted the most important types. It is no counter-argument against this assertion of dissolution that transitions can be discovered not just for individual

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8. Lukács refers to poet and *Nyugat* editor Mihály Babits's response to criticisms of Endre Ady by Albert Berzeviczy. Babits's response was entitled 'A Kettészakadt Irodalom [Literature Split in Two]', Babits 1927. The title referred to the split between conservative and modern literary tendencies.

9. Especially in 'Populist Writers in the Balance', in this volume.

writers, but also for tendencies or for the shades of tendencies. For, viewing the literary totality, the divisive oppositions were so deeply and powerfully rooted in the social antitheses of counter-revolutionary Hungary that, even if the writers themselves rarely acknowledged it, productive debate between tendencies was no longer possible. This was true not only between right-wing and left-wing literature, but also between progressive tendencies (urbanists and populists). From this follows the solitariness of the period's greatest writers, especially influencing Attila József's career. Among the older writers, only Zsigmond Móricz found a closer connection to the populist writers in the last period of his life.

## II

Has this situation changed with the liberation? The response is not easy. Certainly, the objective preconditions of the unification of literature are in the process of coming into existence. Nevertheless, there is no serious sign that would indicate that the unity itself is already emerging. The mutual distrust has not ceased; productive debates between tendencies have not arisen.

One must especially underscore this last point because only this clarifies the concept of the unity of literature. Precisely, productive debate is, perhaps, the most important criterion of an existing unity and, at the same time, proof of a sustained or forming unity. In the Soviet Union, there are already no classes; the fundamental social conditions of unity are, therefore, much more solid than in any other country. Exactly for this reason, very interesting and significant is the criticism that Stalin, a few years ago, passed on Russian writers. He condemned the fact that there were not sufficiently crystallised literary tendencies in Soviet literature, that the periodicals had to an insufficient extent built up a tendential physiognomy, that the struggle of tendencies in literature was not sufficiently lively.<sup>10</sup>

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10. It is not clear to which of Stalin's pronouncements Lukács is referring. Interestingly, however, Stalin made such an argument in 1929, in a response to the leader of the Proletarian Theatre, Bill-Belotserkovsky, who had criticised the prominence of Bulgakov's play, *Flight*. In his response, in a letter dated 2 February 1929, Stalin argued that while Bulgakov's play must be understood as anti-Soviet, he argued against simply banning it: 'Why are Bulgakov's plays staged so often? Presumably because we have not enough of our *own* plays suitable for staging. Of course, it is very easy to "criticise" and to demand the banning of non-proletarian literature. But what is easiest must not be considered the best. It is not a matter of banning but of, step by step, ousting the old and new non-proletarian trash from the stage by competing against it, by creating genuine, interesting, artistic Soviet plays capable of replacing it. Competition is a big and serious matter, because only in an atmosphere

This criticism is doubly appropriate for us; the truly different visions that necessarily arise about social orientations and perspective, have to bring about different tendencies in literature and literary criticism to an even greater extent. Yet, almost without exception or with very few, oppositions only break out where individual writers come forth with expressly anti-democratic conceptions. At that point, the oppositions transfer onto a purely political terrain and, thus, hardly – or not at all – have any productive effect on literature itself.

Still, where serious attempts have been made to come to terms with the past and debate future perspectives, where these debates have taken place before the public (and not in a small conventicle), it has come to light that a substantial number of the old antitheses are obsolete, and that there is no objective reason why they should continue to disintegrate our literature. (Consider the interventions of József Darvas and Milán Füst, as well as Zoltán Horváth and Ferenc Erdei following my lectures at the political academy of the Communist Party;<sup>11</sup> the National Peasants' Party's afternoon-debates about problems of literature.) Unfortunately, these debates, however, have had very little effect on the whole climate of opinion of writers.

Of course, we know very well that all these issues have their objective causes. These objective causes are, in fact, so well known that here we can be content with simply listing them. Such causes are, primarily: the writers' financial situation, their almost insurmountable burden of fighting for bare existence; the great difficulties that the publishing field faces; the insufficient size of the journals and magazines that, thus, cannot provide literature and literary criticism with enough space; and the almost complete lack of literary journals.

In this connection, it may be most to the point to recall the psychological obstacles to literary debate: the ideology of fear. Even today, this is exceptionally widespread; there are hardly any private conversations in which we do not confront this ideology; there are hardly any published debates in which, of course only in allusive form, it does not appear. Yet there is hardly any socially widespread mood that is so objectively unfounded as this, which would so fundamentally be an excuse and a diversion from seriously grasping the true problems as this is. In his now-recognised article, István Bibó gave expression

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of competition can we arrive at the formation and crystallisation of our proletarian literature'. – Stalin to Bill-Belotserkovsky, Stalin 1954.

11. Lukács's speech, 'Literature and Democracy I' (see this volume), was delivered to the Hungarian Communist Party Political Academy on 26 January 1946, and was printed, along with responses by the writers Milan Füst and József Darvas in pamphlet form: Lukács 1946a.

to this mood.<sup>12</sup> The impartial debate that took place around this article is the clearest proof of how unfounded is this very widespread mood.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, beneath this mood, there is also a latent, but genuine, problem. There are those who only recognise the existence of freedom of speech if one is also free to pronounce and disseminate any kind of counter-revolutionary ideology. This is a mistake. The freedom of thought and speech of democracy, particularly of people's democracy, does not mean that everyone, 'every Hungarian person', as Péter Veres expressed it, is free to be able to undermine the new Hungarian democracy, which is now developing and is both organisationally and ideologically still weak. Great tasks stand before democracy's true adherents: in the first place, the spread of democratic vigilance; to distinguish in a sharp-eyed, sober, and determined way the ideologies of friends, of those in error, of waverers, and of opponents; and with this, to declare ideological war, in order to make sure that the dangerous systems of thought of the vanished counter-revolutionary period finally disappear from Hungarian public life and literature.

Here, the task and responsibility of the populist writers are particularly great and weighty. Like their old friend, I address them, who recognised the epochal significance of their movement for Hungarian literature earlier than many, as a Communist, as a representative of that world-view that with inexhaustible energy put its own house in order, defeating all who would endanger, with their sectarian conception, the construction and reinforcing of people's democracy. This is why I think that I am entitled to direct the following encouragement to Péter Veres and his friends: they should also be putting their own house in order; they may have an easier and more productive time working to guide the world-conception of their followers towards democratic clarification than it would be possible for a critique coming from without.

The primary purpose of every literary discussion is to change the so-called delicate issues into the subject of friendly and honest debate. I am, therefore, delighted that Péter Veres spoke out here on the question of László Németh. It is above dispute that László Németh is a talented writer. No one has the right to throw obstacles in the way of his literary pronouncements. We Communists should do this least. If my comrade and friend, Tamás Major, the

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12. Lukács refers to István Bibó's 1945 essay, 'A Magyar Demokrácia Válsága [The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy]', Bibó 1986a, pp. 13–79. Bibó argued that two kinds of fear threatened democracy in Hungary, fear of reaction and fear of proletarian dictatorship. See my introduction for discussion of this essay and the debate it occasioned.

13. Several intellectuals and writers responded in the course of the debate of Bibó's article, including Lukács and József Révai for the Communists and Zoltán Horváth for the Social Democrats. Cf. Bibó 1986a, pp. 81–118.



director of the National Theatre, requested a play from László Németh, it is thus the clearest proof of how we relate to Németh's literary pronouncements.

Yet, László Németh is not simply a talented writer, but he is also the one who thought up the 'third way', 'the socialism of quality', the 'deep-Hungarian vs. shallow-Hungarian' theory, and so on.<sup>14</sup> These are ideologies that, if they had happened to influence the masses, would inevitably have led the Hungarian people to the wall. They are ideologies that today, in so far as they still live in people's feelings and thoughts, are obstacles to their becoming unconditional adherents of the new democracy. The most intense ideological struggle against these theories is absolutely necessary, along the whole intellectual front, and with every instrument of intellectual life. Here, too, the task and responsibility of the populist writers are of primary importance because the elimination of such world-views will be brought immeasurably more quickly to conclusion if the populist writers themselves take up the intellectual struggle against them. Péter Veres declared an abstract and, therefore, incorrect solidarity with László Németh, István Sinka, and such like in their errors as well. For every truly principled solidarity is based on a thoroughgoing community of political, social, and philosophical values. Solidarity is only a virtue so long as it rests on such intellectual foundations. It is not necessary that here, as a Communist, I refer to the experiences of our movement, which has unsparingly turned against even its oldest comrades if they advocated false or dangerous conceptions. Péter Veres should think of Petőfi, who wrote of no less a writer and no less an old friend as Vörösmarty, after his political lapse: 'It was not I but you yourself who tore the laurel from your forehead'.<sup>15</sup>

Let us summarise: the unity of literature is neither mechanical homogenisation nor a tactical smoothing-over of persistent oppositions (see Mihály Babits), but, rather, the unity of the convinced Hungarian adherents of democracy.

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14. Lukács refers to Németh's writings of the 1940s, such as Németh 1940a and Németh 1942, which advanced, in Lukács's view, reactionary ideological constructs. The ideologues of the Communist Party had an almost obsessive focus on Németh, whom they sought to persuade populist writers such as Péter Veres and Gyula Illyes to renounce.

15. From Petőfi's poem, 'Vörösmartyhoz [To Vörösmarty]', dated 22 August 1848, which criticised Vörösmarty, who was a representative in the revolutionary assembly, for voting to maintain the traditional system of command of the army. Lukács is suggesting that, at this revolutionary moment, the radical populists should also not refrain from criticising fellow writers such as Németh and Sinka for political errors as Petőfi had earlier his friend, Vörösmarty.

## III

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to seek the causes of the still-persisting fragmentation of literature exclusively in the objective conditions and the atmosphere occasioned by them. The true causes reside in the internal and external situation of Hungarian democracy, as well as in the intellectual and moral conduct of the literary world, that is, in how a writer may emerge out of four decades of the 'school' of counter-revolution.

It is not our task, here, to offer a political picture of the present-day situation of Hungarian democracy. But, we must take into account that today it is still far from perfect. Both as a democracy and as a system of government, which had to inherit and eliminate the heavy material and moral patrimony of a dishonourable war, lost in consequence of the sins of our own mistakes and anti-democratic arrangements. From this arose those objective difficulties which immediately afflicted writers as well, and which I have already touched upon briefly. However, one must also state openly that the literary world has little understanding of the new democracy, and little sympathy with it as well. This does not reveal itself in their seeing its mistakes and deficiencies sharply and – of course, in large part, only in private conversations – condemning them; but rather in their closing themselves to democracy's incipient signs, new but already visible; in their lack of desire to see the perspectives of the new life; and in their living exclusively in the present, and, should they look beyond it – rather into the past than the future.

This conduct, precisely as literary conduct, calls for criticism. True literary greatness resides, to a considerable degree, in already perceiving the signs of new types and new persons when the average person is not yet able to be aware of them. Writers from Rousseau and the young Goethe to Gorky first saw the new types of people and made others see them as well. I will try to clarify the sort of conduct I mean with an experience from my youth. It has been more than forty years since, at an exhibit, I saw with delight the accomplished paintings of Dezső Czigány.<sup>16</sup> When, however, I gave expression to my enthusiasm in front of a friend of my mother, I received in response a thorough scolding: what sort of a friend of the arts are you if a painter already has to paint good paintings for you to recognise his talent? A true adherent of the arts is he who clearly recognises talent when a successful work of art has not come into existence. Hungarian democracy is not yet successful in all the pictures it is attempting to paint. But, it is precisely the duty of the writer not

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16. Czigány was a member of the modern-art group, 'A Nyolcak [The Eight]', which Lukács had championed in an early review in *Nyugat* 3, 3 (1910); cf. Lukács 1995, pp. 167–73.

to await the perfect work of art, but rather to recognise, even in the presently imperfect seed, talent, novelty, productivity, the way into the future. What would Werther or Raskolnikov have become if Goethe or Dostoyevsky had thought like the overwhelming portion of today's Hungarian writers?

Manifestations of new principles of life occasion a change of function in the whole terrain of world-views, and Hungarian writers cannot, or do not wish to, become aware of this change. Not long ago, we read that a Hungarian writer offered as the lesson of Marxism: 'Hymns are not sung on an empty stomach.' If, during the counter-revolutionary period, workers had repeated this sentence of Dezső Szabó, they would have correctly spoken against the old Hungary, which demanded enthusiasm from them for a sort of state and a sort of social system that represented to them (and to the whole working people) oppression and dispossession of their rights. But, would it not have been completely ridiculous if, in 1793, someone had said to French soldiers: 'On an empty stomach you cannot sing – the "Marseillaise"?' Or, if, in the Commune of 1871 or in the 1917 Russian Revolution, a 'Marxist' had said this to soldiers about the 'Internationale'? Revolutionary soldiers sang the 'Marseillaise' and the 'Internationale' on an empty stomach precisely so that, in the future, their children and grandchildren would not have an empty stomach. This is Hungary's situation today as well. The question is this: what does the hymn mean today for those working with empty stomachs? This change of function is clearly seen and felt by the bridge-building workers, those storming the mines, those making great sacrifices, the new, landholding peasants working under difficult conditions – is it only the writers who lack this capacity to recognise and struggle for the perspectives of the future, making sacrifices for them?

#### IV

The resistance which we encounter among the writers in these questions have, in my opinion, deep-running roots in their world-views, which cannot be done away with by simply labeling them as 'reactionary' (though, unquestionably, not a few of these critics, consciously or not, exhibit reactionary symptoms).

The deficiency of democratic freedom and public life disseminated a particular mode of literary conduct, especially in Hungary and German, that Thomas Mann, writing about Richard Wagner, artfully called 'inwardness guarded by power [*machtgeschützte Innerlichkeit*]'.<sup>17</sup> The basis of this conduct

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17. From Thomas Mann's essay, 'Suffering and Greatness of Richard Wagner' (1933), see Mann 1948.

is indifference, often registered in an ironic judgement, towards the question of what sort of state and society it is in which the writer lives, providing that his purely literary production is guaranteed certain free possibilities, or that these are at least greeted with a degree of patience.

This conduct should not be confused with the self-defence of significant writers in the midst of social circumstances that are unfavourable for literature (think of Gustave Flaubert<sup>18</sup> under Napoleon III). 'Inwardness guarded by power' only arises if the writer, to a certain extent, makes peace, even inwardly, with the anti-democratic state and social system, or if, in his writings, a certain 'inner censor' ceaselessly operates, about whom Heinrich Heine was accustomed so mockingly to speak. It arises if an unspoken 'compact' comes into being between the reactionary society and talented writers, in which it is understood that the society will tolerate poetic expressions of even a certain dissatisfaction, as long as – for its part – literature concentrates itself on the inner, spiritual life and gives up discussing and judging the central, burning, and delicate issues of society.

It would be wrong to see, here, exclusively negative features. There is a certain necessity to the conduct analysed, here: the defence of literary integrity against unfavourable external conditions. In the case of writers whose attitude is not revolutionary, for whom it would be literary suicide to give up working on their most authentic themes, this conduct can result in the preservation of true literature through difficult times. The danger, its problematic nature begins where this 'compact' is already more than an external compromise, more than a compulsory accommodation – when the writer begins to see something self-evident in this situation, to see *the* relation of literature to society as such, to see it as something to affirm, as something advantageous for literature. In Germany and Hungary, this happened relatively early; among the writers in Tsarist Russia, never.

The reflection of this conception is the apotheosis of the so-called Franz-Joseph epoch.<sup>19</sup> Despite the objectively quite unfavourable circumstances – which Endre Ady alone correctly saw and criticised, correctly anticipating the future – the development of the country explosively brought to the surface a whole series of excellent writers. Starting from this fact, however, this period gets constructed as an epoch of literary flowering, an epoch worthy of nostalgic longing.

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18. Lukács viewed Flaubert as a transitional figure between the 'great realist' writing and modernism.

19. Franz-Joseph epoch: the reign of Franz Joseph I of Austria in the Habsburg Empire and Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, 1848–1916.

The guild-like evaluation of literature that reveals itself in this process, which of course is usually registered on the subjective side as jealous concern for and worship of culture, was partially justified, although it never went to the heart of the matter, when it compared the Franz-Joseph epoch to the counter-revolutionary period in order to heap up the latter period's unfavourable aspects for culture. The true problem begins – and this is the pressing problem today – when, again especially in conversation, and especially in allusions, democratic 'chaos' finds itself labelled unvirtuous compared to the 'consolidation' of Bethlen or even Gömbös, in which the 'freedom of speech and thought' of the latter was praised in contrast to the reigning 'terror' in democracy.

'Inwardness guarded by power', as we have emphasised, is a guild-like ideology: it assigns more importance to the individual writer's trivial, daily, professional interests than to literature's epochal values. And, peculiarly, in the eyes of numerous writers – and the public opinion influenced by them – the situation is reflected precisely in reverse: as if they were defending literature, the best, most sanctified part of culture, against those demands that – as in democracy – want to pull it down into the dirt and mud of daily politics. The dangerous, airless space that thus forms around literature, this separation from the major issues of popular life and, hence, from the populace itself, now appears to the writers as an ideal, as the essence of literature, art, and culture.

## V

With this – on the level of world-view – we arrive at the question of aristocratism and opposition to democracy. We should understand clearly that we are not speaking now about immediate politics, but rather about world-view and literary conduct. This aristocratic world-view has become ever more dominant in Europe in the last half-century, once again especially in Germany and Hungary, where it was not necessary to unsettle, or push aside, democratic world-views growing out of revolutions. There, rather, the new aristocratism could, as a simple modernisation, fit into the world and world-view of the old Hungarian gentry and of the German Junker.

Let us make a quick glance at the general situation. In Hungary the development of capitalism dissolved all the remnants of feudalism, without, however, the political and, even, social implications of this dissolution being drawn. From this point of view, 1848 and 1918 laid siege to the old Hungary without result. The gentry continued to be the political and social ruling stratum. In Hungary – contrary to French and English (even Russian) developments – it

was not the revolutionary, democratic ideology that determined the country's development and the development of literary world-views; the remnants of the feudal classes were, thus, not compelled to adapt themselves to the forms of the new world-outlook or to persist in Quixotic struggle against them, but, rather, on the contrary, bourgeois ideology, to a great extent, snuggled up to the ever more decadent world-views of the gentry or, in the best case, found themselves capable of expression only alongside them, in the frame cut out by them, in a certain spiritual ghetto. (Only exceptionally great personalities, like Ady and Attila József, avoided being subjected to this developmental tendency.)

This particular Hungarian line of development joins up with the general anti-democratic, philosophical tendency of the imperialist period. One of the central issues of the whole period is the crisis of the earlier type of democracy, formal democracy. From this crisis, however, there are two ways out: the one leads forward, towards people's democracy or socialist democracy, the other leads backwards along an ideological path that, in the development of German world-views, took classic shape from Nietzsche to Alfred Rosenberg.

The main features of this world-view are, on the one hand, the demand for a new aristocracy, for a new élite, and on the other hand, contempt for and fear of the masses. (It was the specialty of fascist demagoguery that it could exploit this world-view to render the despairing masses temporarily fanatical.)

Both impulses of the new world-view found fertile terrain in Hungary. The more strongly the gentry's material basis was shaken, the more strongly arose the ideology that sought to make a new élite out of the gentry. After 1918, this ideology lost something of its openly gentry features, but, in so far as it demanded the formation of a new Hungarian élite on a racial basis, it could not lead even the plebeian-minded Dezső Szabó to a radical break with the old gentry Hungary. Thus, if the ideologies of right-wing revolution and the 'third way' use this opposition to the masses as the focal point of their world-view, that which they produce is only a decadent continuation of the ideological development of the gentry world. (It is clear that this does not characterise the whole world-picture of Dezső Szabó or László Németh, but the development of populist writers such as, say, Ferenc Erdei, clearly shows in contrast, both philosophically and literarily, what a total break with the old Hungary means.)

We call this world-view decadent because its basic mood is decadent; its reigning impulse is the death-mood of humanity and, in it, especially, of the Hungarian nation; decay, hopelessness and lack of perspective. And it changes nothing of this fundamental fact if – on the basis of some philosophical *salto mortale*, or with the help of some sort of *credo quia absurdum est* – they strive to

develop out of this death-mood a despairingly tragic 'activism'. (Among the 'classics' of this turn, we think again, among the Germans, from Nietzsche all the way to the sort of 'heroic realism' of an Alfred Rosenberg.)

The affirmation and love of the death-mood, of ruin, of decay, the feeling of love directed at death, sickness, and destruction are not chance manifestations; they are much more than mere literary fashion. In those social strata that held Hungary and Hungarian culture in their grip, the death-mood was well-motivated. It was heard not a few times in the new Hungarian literature; thus, in Gyula Krúdy, and likewise, though, of course, seen only now, from outside, in Zsigmond Móricz's novel, *Úri muri*.<sup>20</sup> It is the fundamental misfortune of Hungarian culture that this world-picture deeply coloured even authors and ideologues who, from a social point of view, had no reason to adopt it. Of course, they, too, had Western models. All sorts of crisis of world-view accompanied and expressed the world-crisis of imperialism and imperialist war. This crisis of world-view was based on that well-justified feeling – although only very few of the authors were aware of it – that this imperialist world in which we have lived for a half-century, if it progresses along undisturbed on its own prescribed paths, is bringing the whole of humanity to its final decay or to an annihilating catastrophe. Those ideologues, thus, who were not able to break spiritually from the imperialist foundation and, thus, were unable to turn against it, were necessarily swept into the current of this crisis of world-view and into the floodwaters of decadence. Our social order and our ideological development only offered a particular shading to this general tendency. In Hungary, as in Germany, all this brought into existence the intellectual weakness and defencelessness of the philosophical and literary opposition to imperialism – especially the crippling effect of the pessimism and lack of perspective, the aristocratism and opposition to the masses that also affected a portion of the writers of those classes that, in sentiment, stood against the social order.

This pessimism and death-mood apparently – but only apparently – has serious roots in the Hungarian national character: this death-mood arose as anxiety for the national existence of the Hungarian people was thrown back on its own forces and hopelessly abandoned to itself. This deeply felt anxiety for the homeland was given voice to by Gyula Illyés, deriving from this the pessimistic, fundamental tone of the whole of succession of Hungarian poetry. In our view, Illyés makes a methodological mistake when he generalises. Marx correctly said that a whole series of problems are irresolvable in their general-

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20. Zsigmond Móricz, *Úri muri* (1928), a novel.

ity; if, however, we take up the problem concretely, then the correct posing of the question already contains in it the solution. This also applies to the putative pessimism of Hungarian poetry. Precisely, here, we cannot generalise, we cannot subsume all kinds of very different phenomena under the common denominator of modern pessimism; often, these phenomena are only very loosely related to pessimism, and often they are not related to pessimism at all. If we find in Zsigmond Kemény a pessimistic fundamental tone after the failure of the 1848 Revolution, that has nothing to do with the pessimism of Endre Ady, which was provoked by the absence of revolutionary forces in a time rushing towards revolution. But we can refer to Illyés's own poetry as well, which is perhaps the most powerful evidence against the view he put forward here. His poetry, like his prose, precisely where in form and content it achieves its highest degree, knows no pessimism; it moves far beyond and rises far above this death-mood.

What is the true social basis of this contradiction? It is that many people – in most of the cases, of course, unconsciously – unjustly identify the fate of Hungary under the old leadership of the gentry with the fate of the true, popular Hungary, that of the workers and peasants. Concerning the former, even the darkest pessimism proved justified. For if social and political forces unfavourable to progress had not disturbed the developmental process, already, in 1848, the old Hungary and its gentry-leadership should have been destroyed; even more so in 1918. It is understandable if the ideologues of the old Hungary identified the unavoidable collapse of their system with Hungary's fate. However, precisely, Gyula Illyés has no reason to do this, nor, in his best productions, does he connect the two issues. Because what does a Hungary of workers and peasants have to fear? This Hungarian people, the true Hungarian people, is immortal, like the peoples of the Yugoslavian or Bulgarian peasants. Just like those, it survives every trouble and suffering, it shakes off, if the people's consciousness is awakened, every domestic or foreign yoke. And, if the Hungarian people of workers and small peasants has found itself, then it can live in brotherly community with the neighbouring, greater or lesser, workers- and peasants-nations. For only the vassal-imperialism of the gentry-Hungary gave rise to the hostilities between Hungarians and other nationalities and the ensuing danger of national extinction.

The death-mood, the true pessimism – not even Ady's was pessimism in this sense – is always a peculiarity of the classes and social system that are historically sentenced to death.



## VI

It would be misleading in this matter to confine ourselves to the counter-revolutionary period. That was only when this crisis became acute. But this pessimism and lack of perspective were already the reigning world-view in the externally peaceful, flourishing cultural epoch prior to World War I, especially among writers.

This is not by chance, either. For a long time, objective social development has not been able – the single exception being Russia – to set literature's ideals. The structure of society, in all forms in which it appears, along with the process of social transformation and the role of the person in it, and the crisis of world-views itself were not of such a nature as to render visible to writers and their public the emergence of new ideals alongside the collapse of the old ones.

The spiritual disposition that, thus, comes into existence exerts a great influence on the writer's whole vision and style. It makes a fundamental difference for literature whether the writer sees life in its own totality and objectivity as rational, or whether, instead, he rejects reason, viewing it, at most, as some merely subjective, spiritual particular that stands antagonistically opposed to the confusing, objective, external world, which is, in essence, unintelligible and irrational. In immediate terms, differences of subjective disposition are at issue here. Yet, the objective roots reach back into social reality itself. The question, at least the primary question, is not whether the writer wishes to, and can, consider life to be rational, but, rather, what aspects of the meaning of human development and being become visible in consequence of objective social conditions, and which get obscured, almost irretrievably hidden. Even the extent to which the individual person and individual writer are willing, and able, to go in order to discover the light of reason beyond the present contingent darkness is a profoundly social question. The working class, whose world-view looks at human development in the most comprehensive perspective, from primitive communism to socialist liberation, is the least susceptible to modern pessimism and the imperialist mood of death. Whereas those who fall victim to the period's death-mood most easily are from the intelligentsia, in which capitalist development most strongly cultivated the atomistic consciousness, and especially from those intellectuals who are disposed towards the arts, who, precisely, by virtue of their sensitivity, are bound to the instant and as a consequence of the capitalist division of labour, most powerfully separate from the real life of society.

The objective intelligibility of life is only capable of being experienced, felt, and depicted if it appears as the objective rationality of social life. Reason

that is constructed of purely subjective elements and merely projected into objective reality necessarily runs up against that meaningless medium and is shattered. If, thus, we speak here of literary pessimism, the issue is not whether a writer sees the world darkly or brightly, or whether the beautiful or the terrible takes precedent in his vision of the world. Shakespeare and Dante saw and described more terrible things than Louis-Ferdinand Céline, or than the first representatives of disillusioned and pessimistic literature, Flaubert or Jens Peter Jacobsen. Yet, the world-picture and depicted world of Shakespeare and Dante never became unintelligible. Only in its modern conception does tragedy become pessimism's expressive form. It was not this for the Greeks, for Shakespeare, for Racine, or for Goethe. The tragedy of the individual does not contradict the world's intelligibility – assuming that this rationality becomes visible for the writer, thus depictable in the work of art. Tolstoy's novella, 'Three Deaths',<sup>21</sup> taking its point of departure from his peasant-centred conception of the world, represented the sheer process of dying according to whether the characters' social existence provided a meaningful life or not. If, in my writings – which have occasioned much opposition – I spoke of great realism, I was always thinking, in the first place, of the poiesis of such an objective intelligibility of life.

The crisis that has, for a long time, been latent in the imperialist world-order, however, does not only suggest the objective unintelligibility of life, but also love of this collapse, decline, death, even decay. This has the closest connection with the fact that modern pessimism is always manifested as an aristocratic world-view. There are always spineless, ideological servants of the ruling order, who are prepared to call black white and make a Mirabeau out of the pharmacist Homais.<sup>22</sup> There is nothing more understandable than that, against this servile and mendacious optimism, there would emerge everywhere in literature the unsparing pronouncement of the truth, the tearing away of masks, the exposure of false greatness, and the true diagnosis of the totality of a falsified, sick society. There is nothing more understandable than that the true writer would disdain and despise such optimistic cosmeticising. Yet, the deeper the crisis of world-view becomes, and the more pronounced the aristocratic, pessimistic inward turn, the more affirmative an accent is given those strivings, feelings, and passions that find no place in this world. And, in the unfolding of the process, the more affirmative become the morbid,

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21. Tolstoy, 'Three Deaths' (1859).

22. Homais is a character in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* who is satirised for his long-winded pomposity.

death, sickness, disintegration. Thomas Mann is a representative writer of our time also because his work offers an almost complete history of this sickening and the recovery from it. It is not by chance that, for Thomas Mann, the story of this recovery travels in parallel with his conversion to democracy.

No comment is required concerning how the most various shades of this imperialist pessimistic world-outlook blend together with 'inwardness guarded by power'; and how, on such a basis, a literature comes into existence, formally of high quality in the world of feeling, which – with understandable arrogance – rejects from itself that environment in which it is compelled to dwell; and how, finally, this literature finds its own echo in a stratum of the intelligentsia that relates to its surrounding society in precisely the same way.

## VII

Fascism and World War II broke into this world. The twilight of this world is that society now being born in every country of a Europe that lies in ruin. The crisis of the old, formal democracy reached its peak in the victory of fascism. After the failure of fascism and as a result of its failure, however, the paths that guide into a new, meaningful, and human world became visible. And with this, not only in politics, but also in world-outlook and in literature, a revision of the past became necessary, a coming to terms with the past, in order that the building of a new future might become possible subjectively as well.

We believe that, in many writers, here is – understandably – the deepest, true root of the inner resistance attested against the new. Struggling with unfavourable conditions, counter-revolutionary oppression, and fascist terror, they preserved their literary integrity; in the midst of such external and inner battles, they formed their human and literary personalities. In many writers, thus, truly sincere, deeply felt, subjectively justified sentiments cry out against the necessity of a change in world-outlook, of human reformation, of literary re-education. Of course, even if they do not appear on the surface, there are signs to the contrary as well. Personally, for me, one of these was a conversation with one of the most talented members of the young generation of writers, who had been one of the most outstanding representatives of the surrealist literature founded on the incomprehensibility of life. He now sees clearly that proper orientation in today's life, as its materially appropriate depiction – which is to say, its poetically high-quality depiction – requires a complete literary transformation. But such awareness today is unquestionably still an exceptional case.

Inner resistance is thus very strong, here. And, to be honest: this resistance is, in most cases, directed against us, against Communists, because we are the ones who, in every domain, draw the whole set of consequences from the new situation and from its necessities, including in the domain of culture and literature as well. (To be totally honest, let us also say: not every Communist speech or article that professed generally correct arguments has met the highest level of what was required by the age; often mixed in with it were a few remnants of the – generally surpassed – sectarian spirit.)

But, in the last instance, naturally, it is not the ‘demands’ of Communists that are at issue here. It is not individual people, nor parties, who arise with new demands, but the age itself. A new Hungary is in preparation: the Hungary of working people, of workers and peasants. And this means: those popular strata who are youthful, pregnant with the future, who, when they seek ideals and discover, or have discovered, them, look forward and not backward; who want to create a society in which every person’s life can again have meaning. This new society needs to create a corresponding culture, literature, art, and world-view. Not from scratch; not by starting everything over, but, also, not by simply continuing the yesterday of most of us. Because – at first glance strange, but in no way surprising – those who came before yesterday, those who are still older, Petőfi and Ady, Zsigmond Móricz and Attila József, have deeper roots and louder reverberations in today’s life than the presence of many immediate contemporaries.

What does this new world in birth ask of writers? It does not ask the rejection of the past or of human and literary individuality, nor fruitless declarations of *mea culpa*. It merely asks that with heart and soul, with the innermost individuality, they affirm what is today in preparation. Merely that, caring about nothing else, they leap into the currents of the new world. Is this ‘changing one’s allegiances’? Yes. Goethe said: ‘Yet spirits worthy of looking deeply give boundless trust to that which is boundless’.<sup>23</sup> Is this the loss of individuality, of the literary culture that has been achieved and with difficulty acquired? I do not believe so. Before us, Thomas Mann already set out on this pathway out of the attraction of sickness, decline, and death, towards the affirmation of life, wholeness, and democracy.

The unconditional affirmation of democracy, in whatever form it occurs, with whatever criticisms of individual manifestations it may be connected: this is the subjective basis of the unity of Hungarian literature that must be

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23. Spoken by Faust to Mephistopheles about transcending the limits of thought and imagination’s grasp, in *Faust* II, lines 6117–8: ‘Doch fassen Geister, würdig, tief zu schauen, / Zum Grenzenlosen grenzenlos Vertrauen’. In his text, Lukács slightly misquotes the lines in German.

achieved. No sort of philosophical, artistic, or stylistic divergence can shatter this unity if the subjective basis corresponds to the objective one. Because then, as in the reform-period, the whole of Hungarian literature will seek on different paths the new man of the same age, each writer and each literary tendency in its own way and struggling with the others, but in the final instance also together. Then every divergence will only represent a new colour in the ultimately unified image depicting the new literary flowering of the new Hungary. Only on such deeply philosophical principles, which point beyond literature itself, can the unity of Hungarian literature be built, precisely from the differences of tendencies and of individuals. Without such unity of principle, even affinities can only have the aspect of cliquishness and coterie.

These fragmentary notes can only indicate the most general outlines of the most important question. Only the association of writers, the active participation of however many writers, can have the power to make truly concrete the idea of the unity of literature and create Hungarian literary unity in reality.



**Supplementary Related Essays, 1947–8**





## Chapter Eleven

### **The Tasks of Marxist Philosophy in the New Democracy**

*Lecture Delivered at the Milan Congress of Marxist Philosophers, 20 December 1947<sup>1</sup>*

No one should expect from the following pages a detailed discussion of the basic questions of philosophy. Our goal is simply a sketchy glance through the main tasks, and therefore only some references and a catalogue of problems can be given. This is also, so because it is exceedingly necessary to discuss philosophical problems proper in connection with the new economic and social situation and with the problems of strategy and tactics that originate from it.

Lenin clearly showed that Marxist philosophy received a new emphasis in the epoch of imperialism. He showed that this shift of emphasis was, in essence, as follows: while Marx and Engels were compelled, in the struggle for dialectical materialism, to emphasise

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1. Lukács was invited to Milan by the philosopher Antonio Banfi (1886–1957), who, along with Benedetto Croce, Eugenio Montale, Luigi Einaudi and other distinguished intellectuals, had been a signatory of the ‘Manifesto degli intellettuali antifascisti’ of May 1925. After the war, Banfi was active in the reconstruction of cultural and intellectual life in the post-fascist, popular-front environment of postwar Italy. He was instrumental in the foundation in 1946 of Milan’s *Casa della Cultura*, where Lukács addressed the Marxist-philosophy conference. The lecture was originally written in a German version, which exists in a typescript copy in the Lukács Archive in Budapest, and was delivered by Lukács in French to the Milan conference. It was subsequently published in a Hungarian version, from which I have translated; in French, in Banfi’s journal, *Studi Filosofici* (January–April 1948); and in a partial translation in Italian in *Società* 5 (1947). Cf. Zoltai 1985, p. 236, note 18. For additional background of this conference, cf. Kadarkay 1991, pp. 389–90.

the *dialectical* method, now, the defence and development of *materialism* stands at the foreground. Which raises the question – did the second imperialist World War, the collapse of fascism, the rise of a new democracy, and the struggles fought for this brought with them anything essentially new in this regard?

We believe that they offer new questions, but *within* the framework established by Lenin. Thus, the new often means, precisely, a sharper accent on what has come before and often involves the necessity of clarifying this issue – Why, at present, is it necessary to give special emphasis to certain aspects of dialectical materialism? Exposition of the materialist side of Marxist philosophy is, thus, the central question today as well.

Here, we must struggle against two opposite, but complementary, weaknesses, which appear in the work of some Marxist philosophers. On the one hand, they adequately emphasise the significance of materialism, but they conceive of materialism essentially on the model of the old materialism, in a pre-Marxist manner. Meanwhile – to speak only from the social side – they ignore the fact that the old materialism had its period of flourishing and developed its method before the French Revolution, therefore cannot come to grips with the problematic character of the bourgeois society that came to the fore precisely with the victory of this revolution. This is why the decline of the old materialism began already in the course of the nineteenth century; we can already find among its individual representatives, apologetics for the capitalist social system, while, among others, we find pessimism and the influence of bourgeois philosophy's lack of perspective. We should only mention that this materialism has been completely unable to master philosophically the new problems of the natural sciences of our age as well.

On the other hand, this weakness of the old materialism occasions in many Marxists a neglect of the materialist basis of the dialectical method. They identify the new materialism with the old. And, thinking that they are gaining the upper hand over the latter's undialectical character, they fail to register the essential accomplishments of the former and depend uncritically upon idealist dialectics, thus falling under the influence of the bourgeois philosophy of our age.

### **The new democracy**

All this is still a general problem of the imperialist epoch. Where do we encounter something new? World War II led to the failure of fascism, but did not topple capitalism. Almost everywhere in Europe, there are attempts – and in a few countries, successful attempts – to discover a new form of democracy. This new form would no longer be the reign of 'two-hundred

families',<sup>2</sup> but would, rather, grant working people the possibility of constructing a society where capitalist private property would still exist – within limits and under watch – but where the material and cultural values of the people would predominate.

New problems emerge from this situation. Above all: the Marxist critique of bourgeois democracy is founded theoretically on Lenin's classic work, *State and Revolution*. Is this critique also valid today, with the new conception of democracy? We believe yes, without doubt. If we cannot clearly recognise and, just as clearly, demonstrate that the maintenance and restitution of formal democracy means the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie – what today means, almost always, simply the gradual restitution of fascism – we cannot advance either practically or theoretically. Equally fundamental as this precept is Lenin's complementary principle that proletarian dictatorship means the contemporaneous development of proletarian democracy. If, today, we see before us a new, slower road to socialism – involving, perhaps, less sacrifice – we can only progress along this road if Lenin's critique remains our compass. This is because it is a complete demolition of that political and economic fetishism which, today, still holds sway over intellectual life, including philosophy. Philosophical reflection upon this critique's methodological motives may thus, in the present day, take on an extraordinary practical significance.

First and foremost, we must abandon the practice of judging any social or political phenomenon in formal terms. We must see clearly that *nothing* that some democracy can grant formally is valuable *in itself*. Among the given circumstances, anything may serve as an instrument of exploitation, repression, and political reaction. Marxist philosophy may play a not insubstantial role in the methodological clarification of these political tasks. It has to make sure that the primacy of content over form prevails in methodological terms; presently and practically, this means the permanent primacy of political and social content over legal form.<sup>3</sup> In the transitional period, we are necessarily confronted with a paradoxical situation full of contradictions, which may occasion confusion in the democratically-oriented masses. Because, for people today, as a result of the development of the capitalist-economic system and the influence of a century-and-a-half of the bourgeois ideology of formal democracy, formalistic thinking has become second nature to such a degree that, we could say, we need a change in world-view to make the primacy of content over form a habit of thought.

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2. 'Two Hundred Families': see 'Literature and Democracy II', note 1.

3. For the implications of this emphasis on social content over legal form, cf. my discussion of the Lukács-Bibó debate in my introduction.

The task of Marxist philosophy, here, is so urgent because, in the form-content relation, we need to maintain a precise, dialectical proportion. First, in order to distinguish the materialist-dialectical conception of the primacy of content, as a concrete, historical, and dynamic concept, from the static character of those bourgeois conceptions, which under the influence of imperialist reality, also tend towards a materialist view (note, here phenomenology and the ontology that emerges from it). Secondly, in order that this primacy of content does not degenerate into the destruction of all form. This occurred most imposingly in German fascism, where the legitimacy of every legal form was abolished, giving rise to arbitrary tyranny.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis upon the primacy of content over form in the new democracy is working toward a new legal condition and a new legal security, precisely the defeat of anarchy. The philosophical clarification of these relations may thus be very significant, practically speaking.

If, however, we seek a concrete and historical criterion for content, philosophically it is most urgent for us to discover a dialectical definition of *totality*. For the correct content of an institution, a law, or similar is always decided by the function it fulfils in that totality within which it is effective. Yet, we must consider that, through the fascists' abuse of it, the category of totality has gained a bad reputation. But this situation should not restrain Marxist philosophers from the use of this important category of materialist dialectics. Precisely through sharp criticism, they must distinguish their use of it from that role it played among the fascists and already in philosophy prior to fascism. It must, therefore, be emphasised that totality was, first, rendered absolutely and completely rigid in reactionary-bourgeois philosophy; second, it was set in opposition to the principle of causality, which it putatively excluded; and third, it was handled in terms of a polar opposition between totality and historical process or change. The totalising categories of proto-fascism and fascism (nation, race, and so on) stress an escape from history; the use of totalising categories, first and foremost, aimed at eliminating conceptually the driving impulses of history, above all, the class-struggle.

The true, materialist-dialectical totality, in contrast, is the concrete unity of struggling contradiction. This means: first, that without causality, there is no living totality. Second, that every totality is relative in both directions, that is, constituted out of subordinated totalities and entering as an element of a subordinating totality. It follows, therefore, that the function mentioned earlier is subjected to a similar subordination. Third, that every totality is historically

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4. Lukács would later identify extra-legality and the abuse of legality as characteristic of Stalinism as well.

relative as well; it is changeable, it can come apart, and it exists as a totality only under determinate, concrete-historical circumstances.

Such a view of totality offers the best critical possibility to oppose the attempt to fetishise the institutions of formal democracy. On the other hand, however, Marxist philosophers must take care not to transform this methodologically necessary relativisation into 'relativism'. Our task is to energetically develop the Marxist conception of the dialectical appurtenance of the absolute and relative.

The more we turn to issues of general culture, the clearer it becomes that the proper dialectical treatment of problems is impossible without a materialist basis. Let us demonstrate this by considering briefly that central problem of economy and culture: the concept of the plan. Lack of conceptual clarity about this issue reveals itself in two extremes. On the one hand, bourgeois ideology idealistically over-emphasises the teleological aspect of planning, while, on the other hand, some Marxists at times seem to shrink from acknowledging this teleology. They do so in spite of the fact that, in the Marxist conception of labour, teleology is an essential element; human labour is differentiated from animal activity in so far as the goal precedes the activity itself, shaping the whole labour-process. But this teleological aspect is only one element of the whole process. It presumes, on the one hand, the recognition of every objective element that is independent of human consciousness (the properties of the material, the implements of labour, and so on), and, on the other hand, the determination of a goal itself is a product of the objective social situation, the development of the forces of production, and so on.

This dialectic is indispensable in the clarification of all planning. We must recognise that the spontaneity of capitalist development necessarily works in the direction of strengthening monopoly-capital. Therefore, planning will only be more than demagoguery or daydreaming if we truly recognise the laws of this spontaneous movement on the basis of Marxist economic theory. (For example, the laws that govern the movements from one determinate terrain – market, concentration of capital, the rate of profit on capital – to another, and so on). Only the recognition of these laws makes planning possible, that is, planning how to steer these movements in the desired direction, using the instruments of economic and political power. On the other hand, the relations of power between the classes and the life-needs of the working masses will determine the goals of the plan. Economic clarification is thus necessary, in order to mobilise economic controls against capitalist spontaneity on every terrain of economic life. The legal dimension is a necessary superstructure, yet only a superstructure and, therefore, ineffective against the spontaneity of capitalist development.

In so far as bourgeois economics cannot recognise this relation, in so far as the bourgeois class does not want to really restrict, much less halt, capital's spontaneity of movement, any bourgeois planning is, in the best of cases, a mere utopia. Consummate planning is only possible under socialism, where society is master of every productive force. For the new democracies, a completely new economic problem arises: how genuine governance of determinate positions of economic power can steer the spontaneous movement of the still-existing capitalist system in the desired new directions. This is, of course, primarily a concrete, economic question, both theoretically and practically. But, we cannot clarify the methodological bases of the work to be completed here without a philosophical insight into the whole methodology of planning.

This methodology is, first of all, based on recognising the primary significance of control by a working people's democracy over the decisive forces of production; second, on insight into the laws of the economic totality in its concrete movement. Only in this comprehensive framework can we properly determine and implement in a planned fashion individual measures. (The effect of nationalised banks on the movement of capital; the influence of centralised, state-supported co-operatives on the market, and so on). Methodologically, thus, there is no plan without a clear teleology, but neither is there any real teleology that is not based on the objective, material laws of motion of economic life and on the real relations of power between classes, and that does not adjust itself to their foreseeable developmental tendencies.

## **General cultural issues**

The material-dialectical foundation of the plan becomes, perhaps, even clearer with respect to issues of culture. In the new democracy, the goal of such planning can only be a single one: to raise the cultural level of the workers and peasants to such a degree that, by appropriating earlier culture and by developing and reshaping the previously repressed power of their own culture, they will become capable of occupying a controlling position in the state, the economy, and cultural life. This is impossible without planning. But any plan that does not take its point of departure from real free time as the space for people to move and develop culturally must remain a utopia. The economic plan is the indispensable precondition and basis of any cultural plan.

This stands in the closest relation with the question of education. I believe that Schiller was the first to say that first there must be new human beings, and only afterwards can one create a new society. This conception, in general, still predominates in bourgeois thinking, and today UNESCO has become its

organisational and ideological centre. Every Marxist must see that this manner of creating or educating a 'new man' is just empty daydreaming or demagoguery. It does not consider the social habituation that was so energetically emphasised by Lenin as a necessarily effective power. It does not consider that what is called education in a narrow sense is only a minor part of the real education of every human being; it does not consider what a decisive influence the forms and contents of everyday life have in education, both in negative and positive directions. An education that does not harmonise, but clashes, with those life forms is objectively ineffective; even subjectively, it can easily turn into hypocrisy (for example, children who are raised to be against war, at the same time, however, listen to American radio; their parents influence them in the spirit of the Wall Street press, and so on).

Does this conception imply a fatalistic expectation of the automatic appearance of the new man? No! Because the influence of the everyday environment, and, therefore, of habit is never mechanically simple and one-track. Marx already indicated that even in the class-affiliation of the individual in capitalist society, many unintentional or accidental elements are hidden; and these can be encouraged or inhibited. Capitalism, in general, trains one into 'zoological individualism' (Gorky); at the same time, however, in the very same capitalism, factory-work and class-struggle can educate human beings for socialism: this is, I note, merely *possible* because this effect is also contradictory and does not eliminate the unintentional element. But, aside from all contradictoriness, there is a real point of support, here, real tendencies, with which the planning of education can make a start. And, of course, in other social strata, too, there are such facts and tendencies with which one can connect (for example, experiences during the War and under fascism, and so on).

Secondly, however, social conditions – the objective bases of the habits that Lenin underscored – can also be transformed; at least their effects on people can be modified. The new democracy, on the one hand, establishes this sort of institution in its economic plan (that is, the possibilities for psychological and moral influence of the cooperatives' movement on the peasantry, and such like). Added to this is raising the awareness in the broad masses of working people about their own social conditions. And precisely this is the centre-piece of the question of education in the new democracy. Here, we can only very briefly list the most important points: changes in the decisive positions of economic power; and changes in the relation between the life of the state and the economy. (Instead of the anonymous rule of 'two hundred families', open leadership of economic life through popular organisations emerges.) Changes in the composition of the state-apparatus. Here, too, a prior shift in power is necessary before the education of new cadres. The formation of new

cadres for all these goals is indispensable, but one must – in Hegel’s words – teach people in the water how to swim. Only by means of all these changes, as well as changes in the living conditions of working people, can that new consciousness come into being in them, can other sorts of reciprocal effects happen to the state and economic life, can the masses see the state and economy as their own organs, and not as some foreign power opposed to them. Of course, here, there is a dialectical reciprocity: among the most progressive groups of the working people, this awareness already exists today, and their mass-organisations can bring this consciousness ever more powerfully into the masses.

The planning of education more narrowly conceived can only, then, be correct if we grasp it as an element – of course, a very important element – of the whole process.

All these questions are not only decisively important practically, but also have the closest connection with the Marxist conception of the world: according to our world-view, humanity produces itself in its labour and through labouring. The new social man produces himself as he constructs the new society.

The new society always produces a new culture. But, here, the question immediately poses itself: in what sense is this culture truly new? How does it relate to the culture of the past? This question already appeared at the outset of socialism. Lenin always rejected the proclamation of the so-called radically new. (Cf. the debate he conducted with Bukharin about imperialism.)<sup>5</sup> Lenin’s whole theory of habituation is a theory of the social continuity of culture. Of course, this is a continuity understood in a dialectical sense, such that it also encompasses in it, discontinuity, the emergence of the qualitatively new, the leap. Marxist philosophy materialistically took over and materialistically transformed Hegel’s theory of the ‘braided rows of proportionate relations [*Knotenlinie der Massverhältnisse*]’, revolutions are decisive elements of historical continuity.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Lukács refers to a debate between Lenin and Bukharin in 1916, which revolved primarily around questions of national self-determination, anti-colonial struggle, and imperialism. Bukharin argued against the slogan of national self-determination, seeing it as deluded and contrary to the development of international socialist forces through the economic-political concentrations of imperialism. Lenin, in contrast, argued for a more complex view of the uneven development of struggles under imperialism and hence against Bukharin’s views and those international socialists he had begun to influence. The documents of this debate were not published during Lenin’s lifetime, but rather in 1929, when they could be used by Stalin against Bukharin. See, for example, Lenin 1973b, pp. 13–21.

6. Lukács refers, here, to Hegel’s terminology in the *Science of Logic*, where he describes how a set of relations takes on a stability and self-standing character. The



All this is extraordinarily important from the point of view of the new democracy, which at the outset did not generally experience such leaps in quality. Here, it is even more of a pressing issue for us to see clearly what can be, at all, carried forward from the past and with what sort of treatment. We can only briefly indicate a few complexes of problems here.

First, there is the struggle with formal democracy and its ideology. In our day, formal democracy has, for the most part, changed into a mask for reaction and fascism. On the other hand, the masses, only just liberated from fascist oppression, justifiably demand the broadest democracy. There thus arises the necessity of reconsidering the whole legacy of the development of democracy on its political, social, legal, etc. terrain. A theoretical examination of the greatness and limits of the French Revolution is absolutely necessary, as is a critique of the revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But especially, we must learn from the experiences of the great Russian Revolution, in order to study which democratic elements of this transformation are retainable and useable by cultures of countries without socialist economies, and above all, how.

Second, the struggle against the ideology of bourgeois decadence is decisively important. Here the ideology of 'avant-gardism' in left-wing circles and, even, among Marxists is a major obstacle. For they uncritically conceive every cultural novelty to be progressive and revolutionary. In our view, very precise investigation and critique of such positions, taking as the point of departure their concrete social content, are necessary. Here too, we cannot go into detail, only touch upon the most important issues.

First, I am thinking about the nihilist world-view. We must understand very clearly the relation of fascist ideology to modern nihilism and irrationalism. For these tendencies also have deep roots among the left-wing and, even, Communist intelligentsia, and many do not acknowledge the fundamentally nihilistic tendencies in Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, and existentialism. Adding to this is that the nihilist-philosophical basis, often unconsciously, dominates in the most modern literature and arts. This is completely understandable, because the demolition of man in monopoly-capitalist society is such a fundamental fact of life that it reigns in the arts as well. Of course, we must concretise this issue a little differently from in the case of world-views taken in a narrower sense. Here too, we must resolutely reject all nihilism; in principle, however, we cannot exclude the possibility of

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line of development is qualified by a set of braided nodal points formed by relations of mutual affinity and exclusion.

significant artistic productions even if they are based on problematic philosophical foundations.

The criterion of content can only be found in the exposure of the social bases of ideological decadence. The essential point is the alienation of culture from the great values of the working people, and with these, the values of the nation and humanity as well. Imperialism not only produced a lowbrow ideology of mass-stupification, but also – spontaneously – a false aristocratism in the intelligentsia who were the bearers of culture. We say ‘spontaneously’ because these ideological currents were originally almost all oppositional. Their content was the honourable intelligentsia’s authentic rebellion against the capitalist’s lack of culture and against the human impoverishment and deformation emerging under monopoly-capitalism. But, because these rebellious currents took place without a social basis, without any connection to progressive, popular currents, they lost direction. As a result, they turned inward: an excess and surfeit of unbridled subjectivism, loss of any social-historical perspective, led organically and necessarily to nihilism. The tendency of nihilism grew even stronger in so far as, on this basis, there developed among those intellectuals, honourably thrown into despair, an inclination towards complacency and self-regard. If, on this basis, a collision with the social context results, if this context gives signs of obtuseness, then, already, spontaneously aristocratism emerges, a contempt for the masses.<sup>7</sup>

The necessary consequence of all this is that the more powerfully extreme reaction uses anti-capitalist gestures to intervene against liberation and revolution, the more defenceless such intellectuals become against reactionary ideologies, despite their best intentions. Imperialist reaction has become all the more conscious of the possibility offered here. It sees ever more clearly the usefulness for its own purposes, of a new aristocratism, of a new nihilism lacking any perspective, of ideologies of hatred for the masses. (The fate of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, André Malraux, and Arthur Koestler are socially typical.)<sup>8</sup> But, even if individually the matter does not get to this point, the invitation from decadence to be socially passive – even in the case of a subjective sympathy for progress – objectively supports reaction.

Against such ideologies we must struggle most intensively. But if cultural questions, and especially questions of literature and art, are at stake, the resistance always appeals to endangered liberty. Here, we must precisely distinguish in the ideological struggle, a liberty that is not grasped formalistically.

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7. On the problem of ‘aristocraticism’, see also Lukács’s intervention at the September 1946 Geneva meeting of European intellectuals, in Benda 1947, pp. 165–94.

8. Lukács is referring to Céline’s collaboration with fascism and the apostasy from communism of Malraux and Koestler.

It follows, first and foremost, that for fascism and open reaction, there can be no liberty in the new democracy. However important art, literature, and philosophy may be, they cannot be used as excuses for the dissemination of reactionary (completely or partially fascist) views.

In this framework, unconditionally necessary is the freedom of opinion in artistic creation and in criticism. Here, too, at times, even among Marxists, we have observed false extremes. On the one hand, excessive bureaucratic oversight of cultural phenomena, and, on the other hand, the tendency to grant freedom to *every* opinion on the terrain of culture. But if, here, we are speaking of a freedom of criticism, this, in the first instance, means the freedom of Marxist criticism of decadent-bourgeois culture, even if this refers to world-famous notables or simply appears in our ranks. The Communist Party as such has, of course, no aesthetic in the sense of tying entry into the party to some artistic profession of belief. But Marxists do, indeed, have their philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, cultural conceptions, which, in and outside the party, they strive to realise with weapons of ideological persuasion. We must elaborate these partial elements of Marxism and concretise the tasks particular to our age; in large part, however, this work still stands before us.

### Problems of legacy

'Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture'.<sup>9</sup> With this statement, Lenin in no way contradicted the idea that Marxism is something qualitatively new in the history of thought, signifying a decisive turning-point.

In order to give some faint characterisation of the greatness of this turn, we will point out one aspect of the history of philosophy. Although, both in philosophy itself and in its history, the opposition of materialism and idealism is decisive and primary, nevertheless this struggle appeared in a very complicated way in the epochs prior to Marx: materialism struggled against idealism and dialectics struggled against metaphysics. These two lines of battle ceaselessly crossed one another, because idealism is frequently the bearer of dialectical thought and, thus, in certain periods in the time before Marx, it had a certain progressive significance and scientific productiveness. Since the coming into being of dialectical materialism, the struggle in philosophy has

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9. Lenin 1965b, pp. 316–17.

simplified: the materialist dialectic stands opposed to an ever more reactionary and sterile metaphysical idealism.

Let us recall, in this context, that Marxism gives practice a completely different place in the whole framework of philosophical world-views. In earlier philosophy, practice either was set aside in favour of the wise man's contemplation (ancient philosophy, Spinoza, Hegel) or the emphasis on practice carried with it subjectification and the restriction of theory (Kant). In this matter, too, Marxism guarantees a totally new type of world-view.

This energetic emphasis on what in Marxism is new, does not imply any contradiction with our recognising a legacy. But, precisely here we must seek an important viewpoint: how we should, in fact, link up with the true high-points of the preceding historical development. Thus – just to remain with the most recent times – we must see as essential legacy: the great materialist philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the development of the dialectical method in German-classical philosophy; David Ricardo's classical-political economy; the collapse of Ricardo's school and the classics of utopian socialism; the great historians of the beginning of the nineteenth century; and the Russian democratic, revolutionary tendencies.

Only by working through this legacy can we wage a sharp and successful struggle against ideological decadence. Against Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and their successors; against subjectivistic-political economy; against the falsification of history elevated to a method. General rejection of the modern tendencies in social science does not exclude learning from their factual research, detailed investigations, and such like. But, in the employment of these results, we must be extremely careful, because there often exists a close – and misleading – relation between method and the establishment of facts.

Of course, in ideological issues as well, Marxism stands on the basis of recognising uneven development. From the point of view of the present situation, two important groups of problems follow from this.

First, there is the enormous upsurge of the natural sciences and, accompanying it, the deepest internal crisis. Uninterrupted progress in the natural sciences in the midst of the general ideological decline of the bourgeoisie is an economic necessity. But this period of decline – especially since the beginning of the imperialist epoch – has revealed itself in the philosophical conclusions that have been drawn from the accomplishment of the natural sciences and which are becoming ever more reactionary. While, in the age of the rise of bourgeois culture, it was, precisely, the philosophical generalisation of the achievements and methods of the natural sciences that gave the most important impetus to progress in the development of human thought, today, natural-scientific philosophy for the most part plays the opposite role.

Here, a great task is awaiting Marxist philosophy. For, objectively, every achievement of the modern natural sciences supports dialectical materialism. Only, we must emphasise the materialist dialectics latent in its achievements and method and make this conscious. For this, of course, we need the kind of Marxist philosopher who has a concrete, superior knowledge of the natural sciences. This is because generic epistemological and methodological refutation showing that the philosophical generalisations of modern natural science are idealistic are, though as such correct and useful, completely insufficient. Along with such refutations, we need both concrete expositions of questions correctly posed on the basis of dialectical materialism, and concrete demonstration of how insoluble questions or artificial compromises can be tackled with the help of dialectical materialism.

The second group of problems is that relating to modern literature and art. Here, we find ourselves in a very tangled situation, often among Marxists as well. On the one hand, an artificially isolated content is considered separately, and only expressly revolutionary, expressly proletarian art is accepted, while all other art is, without any further consideration, rejected. On the other hand, artistic form is artificially isolated. Here, the strange conception appears that, putatively, social revolution must mechanically bring into being, in parallel, a revolution in artistic form, making the formal revolution an accurate expression of the revolution in reality. Viewed from this angle, all previous art appears obsolete and philistine, while only modern avant-gardism is revolutionary. This false antinomy occasions a whole set of false positions. First, only immediately militant art is recognised as genuine art, and an exaggeratedly narrow conception of what Lenin called 'partisanship' emerges. Second, a few Marxists then abstain from making judgements about formal and stylistic matters and abandon 'partisanship' in aesthetics.<sup>10</sup>

Against all this, we must emphasise the objectivism of our method. We must ask: what does the artistic work depict objectively and relationally, independent of the author's ideological programme? The object of the Marxist position is, thus, not the author's intention, but, rather, the artistically-shaped reality. Facing this reality, however, we cannot abstain from judgement about formal and stylistic matters, nor can we refer such positions to the terrain of judgements of subjective taste. Of course, the basis of the Marxist position is not formal, even in matters of form and style. It is, more or less, this: what facilitates or inhibits a certain stylistic tendency in general and the stylistic aspiration of an individual artist or work in particular?

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10. For Lukács's understanding of 'partisanship', see 'Poetry of the Party' in this volume.

Implicit in this way of posing the question is our position on the fundamental issues of aesthetics concerning, first, the artistic reflection of reality, and then, the particularity of this artistic reflection. On the one hand, this implies struggle against the undialectical theory and practice of reflection as copying (naturalism), and on the other hand, against the jettisoning of reality, the irreality of content and form. We must recognise and re-assert the humanistic function of art, being that of redeeming man and the human in unfavourable times and raising them up in favourable ones. Art reveals the cavalry and final victory of the human principle, the ‘cunning’ of this path (Lenin) and the typicality of individual life. This ever-present human principle makes art irreplaceable in the reformation and further development of humanity. Only on the basis of these postulates is the Marxist position alongside great realism (extending from Homer to Maxim Gorky) justified. Only from this angle is a correct evaluation of the past and future possible.

Revealing the problematic nature of the present age is an especially important issue. The basis of Marxist criticism in this matter is the dissipation and deformation of man under capitalism, and especially under imperialism and fascism. We must always concretely investigate the artistic response to the objective-social process. For it is very possible that there exists a significant realist art that, to some extent, came into being against the expanse of time and became reality more than once. At the same time, we must also recognise the honourable aspect of misguided protest against the age and, meanwhile, research the problematic nature of the results. The philosophical basis of a major portion of new art – in part, unconsciously – is the dominant, bourgeois, ideological current of our age, nihilism; and most forms of avant-gardism are, in large part, nothing other than the artistic expression of this nihilism. Here, of course, if we do not want to fall into the error of vulgarisation, we must puzzle out, on the one hand, the artistic concepts of perspective and optimism, and on the other hand, that of nihilism. (In these matters, the Russian democratic critics are exemplary.)

## **Ethical problems**

Ethical problems constitute a separate complex. It is not by chance that they take a central position in the ideological crisis of our age. For humanity was rarely so consciously in a situation when it could decide about its own destiny than in our time. Indeed, humanity finds itself continually at a crossroads, both in the large-scale framework of world-history (war or peace, the problems of the new democracy, and so on) and in our individual lives. Everyone had to decide whether they were for, or against, fascism; and even today, every daily

political turn sets each individual person before important choices. Similar problems have, of course, arisen in other periods. In revolutionary periods, however, such matters always present themselves more intensely and more burdened with responsibility than in so-called calm periods because the consequences of every decision are much more immediate and tangible. In addition, our age – as a result of the revolutionary convulsions experienced for centuries – occasions a greater awareness and a more refined sense of responsibility than was experienced in other periods, for example after World War I.

This is why such questions come to the foreground: Is there a choice? Is there a decision to be made? Is this both individual and social? If there is a decision, to what extent can it be harmonised with the recognition of historical necessity? Does an individual person (and his or her moral conduct) have an influence on historical events? (The development of existentialism becomes explainable through this collective necessity.) All these questions are fundamental issues of ethics. Among us Marxists, some have posed the question of whether there is a Marxist ethics, that is, a separate ethics in Marxism. Simply carrying out the decisions of the party constitutes Marxist ethics, does it not? We have to give a clear response to these questions, first, in the interest of concretising the Marxist world-view, and second, to combat bourgeois ideology, which sets various forms of ethics in opposition to Marxism and always in such a way that *the* ethical is opposed to a putative lack of Marxist morality.

We believe that from the standpoint of Marxist method, we must respond to these questions, that ethics is a *part*, an element of the whole of human practice. Here, it is important – as in aesthetics – to break with bourgeois philosophy's conferral of putative autonomy on partial domains of the relation of human beings to reality. Bourgeois philosophy separates ethics from other human practice, which causes, for example, the false opposition of legality and morality; it separates them from human knowledge, which leads deep into the swamp of irrationalism (existentialist ethics); it separates ethics from history, for example, in the ahistoricity of Kantian morality, and if it recognises history, it rushes into relativist nihilism. It limits ethics to the interiority of abstract individual resolution, and thus it brings into being the merely apparent dilemma between an ethics of intention and an ethics of consequence.

All these contradictions, of course, are in no way the consequence of some 'immanent' philosophical development. In each of them, in different ways, they reflect the effect of the capitalist division of labour on human beings and thought. Every insoluble problem, every irresolvable antinomy, every pseudo-problem in bourgeois ethics reflects the structure and development of bourgeois society in conceptualising practice.



Therefore, here too, the critique of the legacy of the past is absolutely necessary. Here, too, we must pay attention to the progressive tendency in scientific ethics from Spinoza to the age of the Enlightenment, to the tendency of generalising dialectics in Hegel, and beyond this, to the emphatically social character of ancient ethics. Of course, we are, once again, talking about a critical processing of our legacy. At the same time, we must wage a forceful critical struggle against the individualism, beginning in Kantian ethics and reaching its culmination in existentialism, which, in existentialism, has already turned into nihilism. Alongside all criticism, Marxist ethics takes as its inalienable legacy the great traditions of human practice, which Lenin, in his theory of habituation, expressly recognised.

Bourgeois society divides the public person from the private, the citizen from the bourgeois. And the development of this society always carries with it the diminishment of the citizen-dimension of the person, which, even at the outset of bourgeois society, was abstract and full of contradictions. We must establish the objective necessity of this process, in the course of which, however, we must see that the reduction of the person exclusively to the private dimension, means the mutilation of the whole, many-sided person, however much even the most despairing bourgeois individualism feels itself self-satisfied and at home in this mutilated condition.

The struggle waged for the comprehensively manifold man is the old slogan of revolutionary democracy; today, it can be revived under conditions that favour its realisation better than ever before, though it may well be that we see clearly that only socialism can bring about its complete realisation. But, precisely in opposition to bourgeois ideology, we must understand and emphasise that the comprehensive manifold nature of man is not achievable without active participation in public life. And, moreover, we must understand that true democracy manifests itself and differs essentially from formal democracy precisely in so far as it strives, to the greatest extent possible, to connect in a powerful and manifold way the self-activity of each individual person with public life. The true, new democracy everywhere produces real, dialectical passages between private and public life. Of course, a person is always part of public life. And this aspect of social development becomes effective particularly intensely in the crisis of imperialism, but only objectively and spontaneously, only in so far as the private person consistently, and to an increasing degree, becomes a suffering object of public life. (Existentialism expresses this situation with caricature-like clarity with categories such as '*Mitsein*' and 'being-in-the-world'.) In the new democracy, however, that turn occurs in which the person participates in these connections between private and public life not as a suffering object but as an active subject.



Here, a turn takes place on the terrain of world-views as well. In bourgeois society, public life is the abstract domain for 'general' issues, while everything concrete (the economy, and so on) belongs to the domain of private life. Underlying this was originally the classical theory of bourgeois-political economy: the thought that economic life, left to its own immanent movement, spontaneously brought about advantages to everyone and the flourishing of every human possibility. In the time of Adam Smith or David Ricardo, this was a justified illusion. Since the capitalist economy has proven, in practice, the opposite, this ideological foundation becomes hypocritical, whereas, even today, it is an unspoken assumption of bourgeois morals. If Nietzsche, thus, in his critique of morality, coincides at times with the morality of this period of boom – with Mandeville, for example – this is just appearance, for the meaning of his exposition is diametrically opposed.

It is even more important that all bourgeois ethics – consciously or unconsciously – assumes that each person's freedom limits that of others, and that ethics is a call to save, in such a world, the moral purity of ethical action. From this emerges, on the one hand, the opposition of legality (an ethical minimum) and morality, and on the other hand, the turn inward and towards the mere private person. Objectivity gets denied or consigned to transcendence.

The turn now appearing in ethics, first and foremost, shows that the freedom of others does not limit each person's freedom, but, rather, is the precondition of it. Only in a free society can the individual be truly free. From this, however, a new conception of the unfolding of personality follows. While bourgeois ethics could only seek this unfolding of personality in the intensification or extension of the isolated individual, for Marxism the development of personality from the outset means: the richness of life, above all, the richness of the most various human associations, mastery over the different domains of life. Anyone who oppresses and exploits other people cannot himself be free, not even individually (already, negatively, the Stoics and Epicurus recognised this).

The further basis of Marxist ethics is the recognition that freedom is nothing other than necessity recognised. This stands in the closest relation with the fact that people conceive of themselves as elements of humanity. Objectively, this is always the case. But it makes a qualitative difference that now this has become conscious, a conscious motif of practical action. It is an essential characteristic of our time that the immediately collective, constraining relations in which men act become concretely visible in connection with the development of humanity. The relation of the single individual to his class – and of course, this applies only to the classes of the working people and especially the proletariat – now presents itself in the framework of humanity's destiny.

Our becoming conscious of this relation, its translation into everyday, conscious practice, means the shedding of the last remnants of animality, the characteristic sign of which is, precisely, that lack of species consciousness in the individual. It was an enormous advance in history when the awakening of individual consciousness emerged from unconscious collective life. Now, we stand at a qualitatively higher level of this process: the consciousness of the human race has awakened in the individual. In the figure of the collective in history to date, which, in sum, constitutes the history of humanity, 'zoological individualism' has, from beginning to end, predominated. With respect to the individual, humanisation already appeared a long time ago; for the first time, in proletarian class-consciousness, there emerges the notion of a concrete and conscious relatedness to the fate of the human race. Now, there appears as the great question of the present day the opposition of the humanisation of national consciousness to imperialism, which cultivates the 'zoological individualism' of nations.

The basis of all these conceptions is the general world-view of Marxism: we make history ourselves, we shape our own destinies. It is a familiar fact that Engels situated this work of human self-creation precisely at the beginning of human history. Consciousness of human activity and self-creation appeared only slowly and very unevenly in the historical process. The consciousness and self-consciousness of the human race, now appearing, opens a prospect on the end of humanity's 'prehistory'. With this, the self-creation of man receives a new emphasis: seen in its overall tendency, there emerges the connection of individual self-creation with the self-creation of humanity. Ethics is now an important, binding link in this whole process. Precisely because it waives any kind of autonomy, because it consciously sees itself as an element in the total practice of humanity, it can be an element in this enormous transformational process, the true becoming human of man.

## **Problems of religion**

Here, the unbridgeable chasm between Marxism and religion becomes clearly visible. Recognition of the dialectics of nature offers a picture of the world that stands on the basis of the world's self-moving character (consider Engels's polemic with Newton's idea that the world is an eternally wound clockwork). Historical materialism and, in it, Marxist ethics show the self-moving character of humanity, the self-creation of mankind.

Despite all the possibility and desirability of practical political work together with as many religiously inclined people as possible, this philosophical division cannot and should not be bridged. Here, too, we see two false extremes.

We see excessive leftist resistance to the correct, democratic tactics of the Marxist parties, which requires close co-operation with all democratically-minded people and groups, without respect to their philosophical or religious conceptions. Closing oneself to the necessity of such cooperation is narrow-minded sectarianism. Lenin, already a generation ago, demonstrated the incorrectness of 'allowing the forces of the really revolutionary economic and political struggle to be split up on account of third-rate opinions or senseless ideas'.<sup>11</sup> Now, when we are struggling to construct the new democracy against the vestiges of fascism and attempts to revive it, emphasising these differences of world-view, bringing them to the fore and heightening them, can only render service to reaction.

Misunderstood or exaggerated estimation of these relations, on the other hand, may occasion unnecessary leniency towards religious world-views. For example, there are conceptions that suggest we can arrive at agreement in ethical matters with religions. We consider these conceptions mistaken. No one denies the great historical importance of Christian ethics, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Acts of the Apostles, and so on, but, here too, unbridgeable divides remain, precisely, if we see the nucleus of the Marxist world-view to be the rejection of every 'world beyond', every other worldly help, along with the self-moving character of humanity.

A clear understanding of these differences is no obstacle to tactical co-operation, and we must not allow it to become one. Indeed, it is a mistaken view that through philosophical concessions and glossing over philosophical differences we can create an atmosphere of greater trust between Marxists and those of religious inclination. We believe that, precisely on the contrary, these allowances only strike intelligent people as dishonest and 'tactical' in the bad sense. Precisely openness in philosophical matters, along with honesty in political cooperation and the honourable intention to settle differences of world-view only by democratic means, can lead to this atmosphere of mutual trust.

Marx and Lenin clearly recognised the social bases of present-day religious sentiments, their social nature. Present-day religious sentiments derive from the seemingly insoluble terror and uncertainty of capitalist life. Seen from this angle, it is not surprising that fascism, the War, and the period that followed, strengthened, rather than weakened, the influence of religion and the churches. The task of Marxists is to direct the attention of the mobilised masses to the social essence, to real liberation, to the elimination of fascism, to the struggle against imperialism and war, and so on. Everyone knows all this, today, in

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11. Lenin 1965a, pp. 83–7.

practice. But it is important that we understand theoretically, with Lenin, that a tactical understanding of religion is not in opposition to Marxism, which, being a materialism, is atheistic. We must understand that only on the basis of a Leninist understanding and tactics can the social roots of religions – very slowly and very unevenly – wither away, that the materialist education of the workers and peasants in their struggle for life can, and must, progress in the meantime; and that an alliance with honourably progressive, but religiously-inclined people can become truly solid, precisely on this basis.

A separate issue that we must, here, briefly touch upon, is the modern atheism of a part of the intelligentsia. This developed slowly in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At first, only a subjectively oppressive disconsolateness and lack of prospect appeared. Slowly from this developed the religious atheism of Nietzsche and of some of Dostoyevsky's characters. Today, we see the philosophy of religious atheism in Heidegger and Sartre. In this development, the nihilistic element becomes every stronger. In parallel with that, these conceptions remain open to every reactionary and decadent spiritual current.<sup>12</sup>

We believe that, precisely here, we must wage an intense ideological struggle to show that this atheism in no way reins in reactionary views. Because, as we see it, atheism is only one of the consequences, a negative consequence, of the world being founded on the self-movement of matter, of society having – since the awakening of humanity's social consciousness – its own conscious and self-conscious movement. Here, God has disappeared – and leaves behind him no remainder. In contrast, for Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, God *died*; prior to that, there was a meaningful world full of God, and the world without God is empty and meaningless. For Heidegger and Sartre, there is likewise no God, but for them, too, the world is an empty world abandoned by God. The religious need remains, must remain, because its social basis, life's terror and uncertainty, is the 'ontological' foundational fact of their philosophy. Thus, alongside any atheism, they must seek out, here, the mystical, mythological satisfaction of religious needs: indeed, contrary to his atheism, Heidegger can even appropriate Kierkegaard's theological definition of concepts. In contrast, Marxist atheism is a part of a social practice that, at some point, will create for

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12. Lukács developed the concept of 'religious atheism' extensively in his critique of philosophical irrationalism in *The Destruction of Reason* (1954), Lukács 1980a, which was drafted primarily in the Soviet Union during the War but only published subsequently. The main representatives he considered in that work were Arthur Schopenhauer, whom Lukács identified as the founder of the tendency, followed by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Lukács discerns unconscious resonances in Kierkegaard as well, however, thus allowing him to utilise this concept wholesale in his ideological battle against existentialist philosophy.

all humanity a life in which religious needs become extinct. And, for those who consciously and militantly struggle for this goal, religious needs already, today, no longer exist. Precisely because reality appears, here, as the arena of struggle for humanity's self-liberation, the world without God is not an unconsoling, prosaic world. On the contrary, a sort of pathos of this perfect secularism appears in so far as every spiritual and moral value is completely abolished which has up to now lived in a religious or semi-religious form. From the fact that human beings create themselves through their own labour, from the prospect that humanity will produce itself through conscious collective work follows that calm, but pathos-laden knowledge and self-awareness that we stand at a turning point in history. In this pathos is the moral side of this prospect that human 'prehistory' is coming to a close.

Since the world-historical process is unitary, religious atheism arises from the same world-situation as Marxist atheism. But the former is a mystified caricature of the latter; already Kierkegaard – unconsciously – constituted a caricature-like pendant to the works of the young Marx. This opposition is reflected in every issue. For Marxists, atheism is one element of the total process. For religious atheism, there arises here the philosophical-religious question of the individual isolated in capitalist society. Marxism rejects any other-worldiness. Religious atheism says: God is dead or there is no God – thus man must play the part of God; religious atheism necessarily turns into the eclectic unity of nihilism and mysticism.

## Problems of the nation

We stand in the exact centre of a general transformation in which the problems, despite the greatest national differences, everywhere reveal their affinities. The struggle for the new democracy everywhere poses similar economic and social problems, and everywhere, similar social forces are mobilised for and against it. This is unavoidable, because the analogousness of the social goals and the class-tendencies necessarily bring into existence similar groupings, similar questions of tactics, and so on.

In contrast – and not contradiction – extraordinary national differences are also appearing. The strivings of the proletariat and peasantry are generally similar, but the means by which they might be realised are extraordinarily different. (Consider the different behaviour of social democracy in France and in Italy, the different influence of capitalism on the peasant-parties of different countries, and so on). This fact is a surprise to no one; already the *Communist Manifesto* points out that even the international revolution of the proletariat will first manifest itself in national forms.

But, today's situation goes beyond this, indeed, with historical necessity. Most of Europe's nations formed at about the same time with the formation of the bourgeois class and under its leadership. The acme of this development is marked by the great French Revolution. It is characteristic that for a long time still, even in the period of restoration, the word 'patriot' meant the same thing as 'revolutionary'. This situation changed with the total victory of the bourgeoisie, with the final consolidation of bourgeois rule. Not only did the nation and national strivings (not even to speak of revolution) no longer coincide with progress; not only did nation and national strivings become instruments for oppressing and exploiting other peoples; and not only were the interests of the working people, even if they coincided with immediately important national interests, subordinated to the narrow and reactionary class-interests of the ruling class (for instance, the division of land in Italy, Hungary, and other countries as a cause of mass emigration). The dialectical contradiction also deepened between such complicated, putatively national values and the values of the people and humanity.

The internationalism of the proletariat was the first, polemical response to this set of circumstances. It has its deep roots and deep world-historical justification in the social being and consciousness of the working class. It served as the basis of the often heroic resistance of the proletarian vanguard. But – two world wars have made evident – this internationalism was not an effective antidote to national feelings, whipped up by imperialist and chauvinistic demagoguery, in the broad masses and, among them, the masses of workers. The masses can only effectively defend themselves against imperialist chauvinism if they recognise the dialectical contradictions in national life and make them instrumental in practice.

This contradictoriness reveals itself in full, precisely, in the second imperialist World War. It was always true that every people consists of two 'nations' of completely opposed values. But the period preparatory to World War II and the War itself revealed this opposition to an even greater degree. The politics of the 'two hundred families', the nationalism of the ruling class advanced towards the destruction of the nation itself, flagrantly contradicting even the vivid national sentiments of the non-proletarian masses. This politics occasioned an explicit betrayal of the homeland, an explicit disarming of the nation in the struggle for its real life-interests, even in its struggles for existence (as in Poland, Yugoslavia, and France). Other countries, with unconscionable adventurism, with the bestial debauchery of imperialist chauvinism, were carried to the brink of the abyss, endangering the very existence of the nation (as in Germany, Hungary, and Italy). Whereas, in the past, small strata were traitors to the homeland (such as the emigration of the French nobility

in the time of the great French Revolution), now, under the leadership of the 'two hundred families' and the influence of Wall Street imperialism, it has become a mass-phenomenon. On the other hand, we also see everywhere a national upsurge – in the economic, political, and cultural domains – where, in the battle of the 'two nations', the 'lower' has won, this struggle has concluded with the victory of the working people.

Only with this does the struggle of the 'two nations' find its authentic national terrain. The opposition of plebeian, national feeling to chauvinism is now coming ever more to the fore as the true defence of national values. The recognition and realisation of authentic national values, however, means, at the same time, defeating the nihilistic ideologies of 'zoological individualism', 'sacred egoism', and 'heroic realism' of the capitalist-led nation. At the same time, authentic, national feeling and true defence of national values are awakened among the previously oppressed 'nation' of the people, which, until now, has been excluded from decisions about the fate of the nation, which has only been the object, and not the subject, of national destiny, which has not been able to participate in the creation and appropriation of international culture. Now, in fact, the 'two nations' are competing for the flourishing or catastrophe of every individual nation.

Against such a conception of the situation and the tasks that follow from it, individual Marxists have registered their resistance in the name of socialist internationalism. These Marxists forget, above all, that achieved socialism – as we seen from the thirty-year-old Soviet Union – means countless, fraternal connections among the national lives of large and small nations. The realisation of socialism does not carry in its wake the levelling down of nations, but precisely – without damaging the socialist unity of the Soviet Union, indeed extraordinarily strengthening it – causes the flourishing of national cultures that until now have been hidden. This process, parallel with the above-described openly hostile opposition of the 'two nations' in capitalist countries, points out the way to a position on the national problem. If, in the new democracy, we see a new, particular road to socialism, this connection is perhaps nowhere so clearly striking as in relation to the national question.

Moreover, they forget that affirmation of the nation conceived in this way in no way stands in opposition to internationalism correctly understood. Already, Marx said that an oppressed people cannot be free. Freedom and, along with it, national life and culture is only possible on the basis of the recognition of the community of interests of genuine nations formed by the working people, on the basis of concrete internationalism. Before democracy was capitalistically degraded, there existed everywhere such democratic and, at the same time, national internationalism, from Anacharsis Cloots to Sándor



Petőfi, and from Gottfried Keller to Nikolai Chernyshevsky. Their efforts in concrete political life came to nothing, because earlier democratic revolutions always led to the reign of the bourgeoisie and, along with it, to aggressive chauvinism, to the oppression of their own people and other peoples as well. The inner political and social structure of the new democracies, if really carried through, make realisable earlier revolutionary democratic ideals, which in being realised also prepare the path for the socialist brotherhood of peoples. Characteristically novel in the new democracy is that this new form of connection between the peoples had already begun to be realised before socialism, while this association of peoples in the Soviet Union was only brought into being by the victory of socialism.

This situation sets important tasks before Marxist philosophy. Marxist historiography must present the national past as the struggle of the 'two nations', as the road towards the present. It is the task of philosophy to elaborate the basic principles of this work and to oversee its execution. We must revise the whole national legacy, shaking it free of all that which the oppressive traditions of chauvinism have served and still serve today. At the same time, we must guard against all exaggeratedly narrow-minded judgements about the past, people and tendencies, even where these ages got bogged down in stubborn ideological prejudices and on many issues were mistaken or even completely astray, provided that in their essence they represented a striving for progress.

We must consider, furthermore, that, in recent decades, every national problem has been knowingly mystified. It is the task of Marxist philosophy to extract, from the concrete history of the nation, particular national principles and strivings. With this, not just should the important sources of national renewal be revealed, but so, too, should the historical aspects of typical national weaknesses – products of the economic, political, and cultural development of national history – be brought to light and, hence, rendered correctable. To Marxists opposed to such a posing of the question, we can say that all this also applies to the workers' movement. Significant figures such as Paul Lafargue or Antonio Labriola, Franz Mehring, or Georgi Plekhanov, show all the strengths and weaknesses of the national workers' movements to which they belong. Indeed, the national strengths and weaknesses of particular workers' movements are revealed most clearly precisely by such significant figures. Not to mention that, from the viewpoint of a general familiarity with the international workers' movement, it is in the best sense instructive to discover those threads that bind the origins and influence of Marx and Engels to the German workers' movement, and that of Lenin and Stalin to the Russian workers' movement, and to national culture as such.



Here, again, the possibility for error is two-fold. We have already pointed out the errors of abstract rejection. But, here too, as with the question of religion, an uncritical attitude towards national development is also possible. The first type of mistake cannot be corrected without very vigilant and necessary struggle against the other source of error. For abstract rejection of any national affirmation can be unambiguously traced to the nightmarish fear of the 'social chauvinism' of 1914 and its consequences. A satisfactory solution depends on the understanding that we are in a new situation, and that here, a new road is opening up before us, in the direction of socialism.

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This wholly new situation, which I have tried to represent from the angle of a few important problems, sets before Marxist philosophy great tasks. Solving them brings with it new difficulties. For, on the one hand, the solution of such new and complicated problems demands exceptionally profound and concrete research, supported by great, precise knowledge of materials. On the other hand, equally imperative is the necessity of rapid and many-sided popularisation. Thus, we stand before the twin dangers of, on the one hand, detached academicism, and on the other hand, vulgarisation. Only the study of the always dialectical method of our classics – Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin – indicates the proper way. We must be especially attentive that the generalisation of our questions never occurs at the expense of a restriction of our concrete research of materials. We cannot allow to happen what the aged Engels warned about in the 1890s, that Marxism 'might serve as a pretext not to study history'.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, allow me, on the basis of my long experience, to address a word of warning to the younger generation of Marxist philosophers. It is impossible to work concretely in Marxist philosophy without the most precise knowledge of the fundamental arguments of Marxist economics, its methods and achievements. A good thirty years ago, Lenin wrote that it was impossible to understand Marx's *Capital* without having studied Hegel's *Logic*. Since then, I believe, the Marxist system of study has shifted a little. I might, thus, give as a contemporary variant of Lenin's statement: it is impossible to understand Hegel's *Logic* correctly – or any other philosophical work of the past or present – without study of all the economic works of the Marxist classics.

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13. Lukács is referring to Friedrich Engels's letter to C. Schmidt, 5 August 1890.

## Chapter Twelve

### **On 'Kitsch' and 'Proletcult'**

#### **A Lecture at the Party-School for Training Cultural Directors<sup>1</sup>**

At our previous meeting, I might say, we occupied ourselves with purely theoretical questions. These theoretical insights play an important role in your everyday life and practice; indeed, one could say that, without these, your tasks could not be carried out very well. Today, we will concern ourselves with certain practical questions, not, of course, in the sense considered in the organisational, practical, and other sessions. In today's lecture, I would like to offer you a few standards of selection, to consider a certain way for you to proceed in the selection of plays, stories, and novellas. Even if you have already received some materials, in the last analysis, if you have to organise an evening programme, the task of the cultural director is to decide what is to be done. You will soon find yourself confronted at home with such cases in which writers will hand you plays, scenarios, or novellas, and you will have to judge these yourselves and decide for yourselves whether these are suitable or not, whether one needs to rework them or not, and so on. At such times, people must themselves decide how the work in question will affect the public, whether it is good

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1. The lecture was published as a pamphlet and included printed indications of topics in the margins. It was intended for use by study-groups.

enough to affect them, whether its ideological, intellectual, and political effect is favourable. It is, thus, absolutely necessary that, in this respect, everyone has a firm standpoint, so that you can take a stand against mistaken and unfounded tendencies that we reject, but which, however, do not want to disappear on their own, but rather spring up and grow like weeds again and again.

I would now like to discuss two such bad extremes that we confront almost everywhere in our theatrical practice.

### **'Kitsch'**

I begin with one of the extremes about which artists are accustomed to discuss with a very short and comprehensive expression: *kitsch*. We should try to come to greater clarity about what kitsch actually is. Above all, if we see the matter clearly, by kitsch we do not simply state that something is bad. If someone simply writes bad poetry, in which the metre is not right and the rhymes are not good, then we say that the poetry is bad. We do not say that it is kitsch. I will give you a very simple example that I am sure you encounter frequently in your life. There are English and American films that are technically flawless. Described in them, very beautifully and very effectively, is, for example, a situation in which the son of a factory-owner is in love with a factory-girl. The merciless father does not even want to hear about their intention to get married. Later, every sort of adventure happens, the old man falls in the water, the young girl saves him, and finally the son marries the factory-girl, whom he leads into a ten-room house and who lives there happily ever after. I latched onto this example arbitrarily, but there are hundreds and thousands of them like this one. I am convinced that there is no one among you who has not seen such a film. Earlier, I said that the characteristic feature of bad poetry is that the rhyme is not good, the metre is not good, the images are neither fish nor fowl. If we think back to our film from this point of view, we recall that this film is technically flawless. We should not say that it is bad because the filming is bad; indeed, in the majority of cases, the filming is excellent. Someone might say that it is kitsch because it is not true. And, in a certain measure, this already more closely approaches the truth; however, it still does not express the whole truth. If we think back to such a film, not a few scenes may come to mind which are not only good from a technical point of view, in the filming and details, but which even correspond to the truth. We have seen, for example, in films the collapse of mines, industrial accidents, or strikes that correspond in every detail to reality. Nevertheless, we could say, and had to say, that this film or novel was kitsch. Kitsch, because it is false, a lie. But, the falsehood and

unfoundedness did not come from the details not being true. What was false, unfounded, untrue, was the *whole* film itself, the *whole* novel. It is, precisely, in this that the cunning of the modern kitsch-manufacturers consists: they know how it is possible to turn out such novels or films that, in their totality, profess a falsehood, while possibly every individual detail, every individual word in them is true.

In what does this falsehood consist? It cannot even be said that the falsehood is a falsehood because it could never, under any circumstances, occur. That is not true. In life, such cases occur that a manufacturer's son marries a factory-girl. Thus, the falsehood does not consist in the details not being true; the falsehood does not consist in the fact that the story that the author narrates could not happen under any circumstances. The falsehood consists in the fact that the *whole, as whole, is socially a big lie*.

Why? Because if we watch a film or read a novel, then without the author expressly pronouncing it, nevertheless the film or play intends to awaken the impression, and this impression remains in us, that in life things occur in this way, that the main line, the main direction of life's occurrences, is like this. And the truth or falsity of this main line decides whether a creative work is true or not. Let us think of such an example when true art, taken as a truth of the whole, prevails. I return to an example with which you are all familiar, about which we already spoke in the previous class, the play entitled *Of Mice and Men*.<sup>2</sup> Here, that is, the writer narrates a story that is unusual and not of an everyday nature. It is not an everyday occurrence that a clever worker, who from the perspective of his own work and employment meets with no obstacles at all, stands together with a half-retarded man, whose stupidity is always for him an obstacle and a burden. Cases such as this occur perhaps only once in a thousand, or ten thousand times, if even that. And, nevertheless, when it was in the theatre, everyone felt that, here, they were met with a true, realist play, and not with kitsch. Why did they feel this way? Because with the help of this extraordinary story, the author revealed to us such a situation derived from life that was profoundly true. It was profoundly true that these backward workers were alone, that for them there was no solidarity, no human relationship, no serious connection between men. And, at the same time, like true people, they had in them a deep longing for human contacts. In them lived a profound dissatisfaction with the inhuman conditions, without their being clear about the cause of the hopelessness of their own lives.

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2. John Steinbeck's novella was published in 1937 and already, in November 1937, had been adapted for the stage. It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle award for Best Play in 1938.

The fact that the worker stands together with the unlucky man and finally is compelled to kill him, casts a sharp light on that whole social situation – the terrible world of the backward American farm-worker, in whom there nevertheless lives a burning desire for a truly human life – so that a profound social truth is revealed before us.

### **Kitsch's social role**

Let us now return to the previous example of the manufacturer's son and the factory-girl. I am assuming something that rarely happens, that all of its details were true. Out of the truth of all the details, however, a large falsehood results, the large falsehood that true love bridges the whole set of class-oppositions, that the opposition of the capitalist to the workers, his contempt of them, only exists on the surface. The old owner comes, in the end, to see that love is the most important thing in the world. We can, thus, see that even if I assume that all the details are true, the whole of the work sets before us a gigantic falsehood about an essential question of human society. And, summarising what we are accustomed to call kitsch, precisely in this lies the heart of the matter. Taken as a whole, from a social or human point of view, kitsch – whether in the form of a play, a movie, poetry, a novel – preaches falsehood. And it preaches falsehood with means suited to set this falsehood before people who are inexperienced, who are not sharp-eyed and vigilant, as if it were truth. Consider, now, that art is one of the most important ideological weapons with which the ruling class can lead the workers and peasants astray. In this misleading, kitsch has a notable role. It is in the interest of the ruling classes to obstruct the awakening of self-consciousness in the workers and peasants. Thus, they purvey such arts to the workers and peasants which, in their details, have persuasive power, which, in their details, are beautiful and moving, but, in the last instance, serve to obscure self-consciousness. They distract attention from the social and human issues that concern these classes, lending credence to the view that such conflicts that are unbridgeable in life, such oppositions that cannot be resolved in society, are resolvable through various sorts of individual means such as love, luck, etc.

I would now like to tell you about another such kitsch-type. A novel describes, for example, a worker or peasant who is extraordinarily diligent, always sets aside a portion of his income, never goes to the pub, keeps from joining the union, and in the end becomes the factory-owner, or buys a small shop, and so forth. If, now, we examine this theme a little more closely, what do we see? Again, I am assuming that in its individual details the work is true, and that, even if not among our conditions, then at a certain time, for example

in the United States or in other countries, such cases, now and then, really happened, that someone could succeed in rising from the very bottom and become a factory-owner or a millionaire. But this novel or film does not preach that, once upon a time, there was a rare case, back when this sort of thing happened, but, rather, states: worker, don't join the trade-union, don't strike, don't be in solidarity with your worker-comrades, save, withdraw, from pennies saved comes a silver-dollar, one dollar becomes a thousand, a thousand becomes a million, it is still possible for you to rise. Now, in this regard, the film does not speak to *one* worker, but rather to tens- and hundreds-of-thousands of workers, and obviously it says misleading falsehoods to them. Let us assume that every single worker sets aside a portion of his or her income. I would now ask: is it true, then, that all these workers, or at least a majority of them, will be able to rise to the position of independent master-craftsmen? It is manifestly untrue. Hence the stupid, misleading falsity of the whole story. Generally, the formal ruling classes are presented in an equally false form, as a class that looks after the people's interests and keeps the people's interests before their eyes. Here, too, I would say: it is not out of the question, indeed, it is completely possible that there were individual officials who were really just, but, if someone offered such a picture of the former Hungary in which the public administration, the military, and the police worked in the interest of the people out of patriotism, then, once again, the work as a whole would become nothing more than an enormous falsehood. Overlooking the degree of truth or falsehood in the detail, kitsch is thus characterised by the declaration – ostensibly with artistic means, ostensibly through the depiction of truth, very often with the help of technically very good expression – of things that are false from a social and human point of view; and it declares these falsehoods in order to mislead the working masses. I repeat: however much, in individual details, it offers the mere truth, in such cases as well, it is misleading.

In the interest of simplicity, I began with the assumption that, in all details, the work of kitsch was true. Of course, this only rarely happens in real cases, since, if an author wants to make a work that is false in a social and human sense, then he will naturally also need to build many falsehoods into the plot-transitions, the construction, and the details. I assumed such an extreme truthfulness in the details of the work in order to show that, even in this case in which all the details are true, we recognise kitsch in so far as, taken as a whole, the work constitutes a falsehood and declares it in the most various fashion. I have encountered kitsch that sought to train people for fascism and chauvinism. I have also seen, however, a sort of kitsch – and this is a substantial portion of kitsch – that does not set forward sharp, determined political goals, thus that does not summon the masses to *direct* support of the ruling

classes. The social goal of the falsehood consisted only in deflecting the masses from that path on which they would be advancing if we awakened their self-consciousness, if they sought to act appropriately, according to their own values and in their own interests. In a short lecture, it is not possible to describe the numerous variations of kitsch. I thus am placing the emphasis on the central issue of the false countenance of the whole artwork. I believe that this is the measure that will help you in your own practice to be able to recognise kitsch; and it is that measure that makes it possible for you, even if clever and well-written pieces come into your hands, to cast them aside.

Kitsch seeks to train people to those sorts of comportment whose development is to the highest degree dangerous for the people. It sets those ways of acting before people as attractions.

I would like to state a couple of typical examples, for instance, expecting a miracle. Today, this most often plays a role in films, but I recall that, in my youth, and probably still today, there existed a sort of kitsch literature for women and girls that cranked out these stories by the hundreds and thousands. The ultimate effect of these stories of expecting a miracle was that hundreds and thousands of young girls appeared who, instead of studying and striving to build up their own lives, quietly suffered every oppression and humiliation, dreaming in their empty hours of the fairy-tale count, or the lawyer's son, who soon, one fine day, would appear and whisk them away from the dressmaker's shop to a palace.

But kitsch singles out its object in opposed directions as well. For boys, there is pulp-literature. And this strives to feed their instincts, their courage, their longing for adventure, and their heroic inclinations.

You, comrades, should ponder this well, because in this is hidden the complicated aspect of the matter. One cannot divide reality into good and bad so rigidly as people would think. Because, in the expectations and the containment of the life-instincts of the young girls, there is a certain readiness for sacrifice as well; and, if such readiness for sacrifice is directed in a good way, then it can be a very valuable human characteristic. There are numerous examples, especially among young boys, in which the courage, cunning, and circumspection of a criminal youth could make this person very useful for society, if they did not continue on their original path. Comrade Dimitrov, when he spoke about fascism, very justly referred to the fact that fascism awakened not only the bad instincts in people, but rather also the instincts hidden in them which in today's society are incapable of flourishing; these, fascism led astray. During the counter-revolutionary period, I encountered people who became Arrow Cross members out of true patriotic sentiment. Even in Germany, I encountered a number of cases in which, out of revolutionary impatience,

left-wing workers joined the Nazi Party, because they thought that socialism would be realised sooner by the Nazis than by other means.

I believe that we now understand the significance of this relation. Your task becomes to examine the works that come before you in practice, not just in their details, for example, whether in a poem the rhymes sound good; but, rather, you must try to view the poem as a whole, examining it well, to see what it means as a whole, from whence it comes and whither it is going, what it could say to those people before whom it would be recited.

### **‘Proletcult’**

I now turn to the contrary extreme. This contrary extreme is what we would call ‘tendentious’ literature, in the bad sense of the term. In our movement, the cult of tendentious literature can be summarised briefly under the term ‘proletcult’.<sup>3</sup> Once again, a very complicated relation is at issue, here, and it is very difficult to comprehend the whole phenomenon in a few words. But, briefly, the essence of the matter is as follows. The bad art and kitsch that the bourgeois class and feudalism produced in our country naturally called forth an opposed feeling among the class-conscious workers and the peasantry opposed to a Hungary dominated by the gentry. Even if they were not clear about this theoretically, they felt that they were being deceived and misled by such ‘arts’, and that they needed artworks and poems that did not lie and that exposed this society. This is a perfectly correct and, in its general direction, quite laudable tendency. Why should we then say that we face here a mistaken artistic tendency? (You must be clear about the possibilities of mistaken artistic tendencies, in order to be able to offer the masses the sort of arts that will win them over.) We say that we are confronting a flawed tendency because the worker or peasant possessing class-instincts, when these instincts are first awakened, only instinctively opposes the truth to falsehood. He instinctively eschews the falsehoods offered him by the ruling class, and this feeling breaks forth from him. Indeed, it breaks forth in an exaggeratedly individual form, excessively restricted only to pronouncing

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3. The ‘proletcult’ tendency emerged following the Russian Revolution, under the influence of Alexander Bogdanov and Anatoli Lunacharsky, and exercised significant influence in the arts until the mid-1920s. The term itself is a contraction of *proletarskaya kultura*, proletarian culture. Advocates of proletcult sought to create a proletarian culture free of the influence of the bourgeois past. Bolshevik leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky argued vehemently against proletcult, in favour of people’s education that would help to cultivate basic skills in literacy and train workers and peasants to take over the legacy of bourgeois culture.



the truth. Thus, such plays or novels come into being that present this class-consciousness directly, briefly, and simply, without artistic depiction. There is a sort of healthy proletarian instinct in these, if, for example, they are of the opinion that the self-conscious workers are the true people, while the strike-breakers and bosses are villains. Suppose, however, I write a drama in which two or three class-conscious workers and a few strike-breakers figure; if I depict the workers as pure, true, excellent people, who have completely good qualities, while, in contrast, the strike-breakers are dark villains who cheat on their wives, beat their children, and along with them, the manufacturer is also an embezzler who has sex with young girls, then such a work will never become a work of art. It emerges again – but now at the opposite extreme – that the aspiration to depict the abstract truth misleads us to an untrue standpoint. Because if I, as a worker, struggle against the factory-owner, it is not because he is a bad man, because he commits this or that criminal act, but, rather, because the factory-owner occupies a certain social position and fulfils a certain social role. Thus, the worker struggles against the factory-owner even if, by chance, the factory-owner is a good, honourable person. On the other hand, is it really true that every worker who is inclined to participate in a strike or to participate in illegal underground-activity and to make a sacrifice, is always an ideal, excellent person, who, in his private life, never lies, always treats his wife well, and so on? Everybody only has to think for a moment and you will soon see that the description of the opposition of classes in which one side is all black and the other all white does not correspond to reality, that it is a matter of an extreme that is the counterpart to that which we discussed under the term 'kitsch'. If we want a true art to come into existence out of our feeling for life and our class-consciousness, then we have to see the full complexity of life: that, both here and there, we find good and bad people; that, here and there, we find complex individual beings. It is from this complexity of life that we need to disentangle the essential threads, the main lines of the development of reality, that which corresponds to the truth of our standpoint. But it is not only on purely artistic grounds, or because of their world-view, that you must reject such works – or at least receive them sceptically.

### **Political assessment of proletcult**

When workers and peasants awaken to self-consciousness for the first time, when they begin to create their first organisations, they usually must wrestle with great difficulties. This is the case with the development of cultural awareness and self-consciousness as well. Let us consider that we are in Hungary,

where, not long ago, we were liberated from thirty years of oppression in which class-conscious workers could organise only illegally or half-legally. Under such conditions emerge what we are accustomed to call sectarian attitudes. Politically, we do not need to characterise this separately, but can pass rapidly to the artistic side of the question. In the arts as well, sectarian art comes into existence: we could label as sectarian art the whole art of so-called proletcult. What characterises sectarianism in political terms? The sectarian could not see beyond the field of vision of that small group of workers and peasants who have achieved class-consciousness or, at least, class-instinct; he was incapable of perceiving the masses, even though he spoke and dreamed continually of them. He set out with eyes closed, alongside the genuine desires, sufferings, problems, and joys of the true masses, a hundred thousand or a million strong; and, therefore, he was unable to find the tone and the slogans that would help to motivate these masses.

This issue, of course, emerges in the arts as well. For the young Communist, the slogans of communism are received as something self-evident. He thinks that if he says: workers of the world, unite! – of which the truth is unquestionable – then the result will show itself immediately; it is only necessary to say the magic words. Unfortunately, precisely the opposite is true. We know very well, and you, who work in the countryside know even better, how far the average peasant is from really recognising his own interests. How much, even today, the former district-magistrate and priest can draw him into actions that are precisely opposed to his true interests. If I, thus, simply say workers' and peasants' co-operatives, for the peasant this means nothing at all. But the arts can say a lot to him. By means of the arts, I can reach the peasant-soul, but only if this art depicts the true reality and complexity of life.

I believe that, from the previous discussion, the comrades will have understood that we take true depiction to be the representation of the totality and details of life in a truthful manner, such that, from this, taken as a whole, those correct, definitive consequences follow that we intended to state. They follow even if, as the case may be, they are not explicitly stated in so many words. There are numerous great works of art that do not state the correct direction explicitly in their conclusions, and, yet, this emerges from every word and the overall course of the work as a whole. Here, the most important thing is that the peasant and the backward worker is led from experience to experience by the work of art, until he reaches the point that we want him to attain, where he will be receptive to our agitation. The comrades should, thus, not think that when I speak against this 'tendentious' art, against 'directed' art in the bad sense, I mean to say that you should create art in the bourgeois sense, art that has no such tendency. Not at all, that is not what is at issue, here. What is at

issue is that we must seek such works that raise the self-consciousness of the masses precisely from the level where they are right now (and not from that where the sectarians imagine), and from this level, step-by-step, lead them where we want to take them. Namely, we seek the sort of works that depict this tendency with the genuine means of art.

### **We must embrace progressive art in its entirety**

In concluding, we must turn to yet one more issue (which, in fact, we would need to have a separate class to discuss), that is, in what ways, and by means of what criteria, should you make a selection of literature, especially Hungarian literature. Here, honoured listeners, once again we collide with a certain limit of sectarian ideology and conceptions. Namely, against the limit of the peasant or worker who has arrived at the proletarian idea, or of the worker who only acknowledges writers who are themselves socialists and of revolutionary tendency; he recognises only such writers as 'his own'. This conception, dear comrades, is the greatest danger that you may encounter in your work. We know very well – and if we discuss questions of Hungarian literature we must emphasise this, too – that our greatest poets, Sándor Petőfi and Attila József, were the most progressive artists of their times. And we profess with pride that really excellent, exceptionally progressive writers stand in the ranks of the Communists, novelists such as Tibor Déry and Lajos Nagy. We are proud of them. But, just as Lenin said with respect to politics, that socialism can never be built solely through the power of Communists, that the construction of socialism required the whole power of the united working class and peasantry – so, too, the construction of people's democracy in Hungary. In consequence, with respect to literature and art, we need to place the whole of progressive art – and by progressive art we do not understand exclusively art made by revolutionary democrats or Communists – in our service.

Of course, all kinds of complicated questions arise, here, that cannot be so easily dealt with. I can only illustrate with a couple of examples what I wish to say in this connection. Let us take an example from Hungarian literary history of the recent past, Zsigmond Móricz. If we consider Zsigmond Móricz's political career, we find with him a whole series of waverings, which we can establish from his newspaper-articles and his writings relating to principles and policies. Zsigmond Móricz was no Communist, indeed, he was not even faithful his whole life to the principles of democracy. Taken as a whole, however, we could say: he was a democratically-inclined writer. Now, does that mean that we must reject, or that we are free to reject from our tradition, Móricz's

*Seven Pennies* (1907), or his *Poor Person's Novellas* (1916), and their depiction of the oppressive activity and necessary collapse of the Hungarian gentry? Here is the pivot of the question, and it is this that I would like to emphasise from a theoretical point of view. These writings – irrespective of whether, in a given case, Zsigmond Móricz harboured this or that illusion – are themselves revolutionary, having characteristics that encourage the advance of the masses intellectually, artistically, and politically. I would be so bold as to assert that, if you want to explain to the peasantry why they need to break with the gentry, why they need to despise the gentry, none among you, even the best Communist, could explain it as effectively as Móricz's *Uri-muri* (1928). But this means that there is a progressive current of Hungarian literature, manifest in these works which are to the highest degree useful for the intellectual, political, and artistic development of the workers and peasants; that there is a progressive current, irrespective of whether the individual writers took this or that position at some point in their political life. It follows from this that, if you are establishing a programme, assembling libraries, selecting passages and scenes for a performance, or recommending books for peasants, then you must look at the whole work of art, the whole corpus of the writer or poet, the relation between the whole and the part, not secondary matters ensuing from the writer's political positions or lack of interest. Not long ago, it happened – and perhaps this example will show most clearly what is at stake here – that a peasant-writer attacked János Arany in the newspaper of the Peasants' Party.<sup>4</sup> He attacked him because Arany, in his poem 'Summons to the Corpse', did not write about the misery and oppression in which the peasantry lived in the Radványi Forest, or about what sort of horrific memories of peasant-oppression were bound up with this forest; that Arany never took any account of this oppression and simply wrote a ballad about Benő Bárczi, found dead in the Radványi Forest. According to this writer, Arany did not suffer from the problems and cares of the peasantry and only interested himself in the fate of the lords. From this frightening example, we can see clearly how we can *not*, how we must *not* treat Hungarian literature. Nor should you think that just because I chose an example from a writer of the Peasants' Party that we could not have found a similar example from the Communist movement.

From this sectarianism, two kinds of danger can arise. In one direction, the danger is that we give up one of our greatest assets in educating and mobilising the masses through the arts; this asset, this treasure, is Hungarian

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4. See Lukács's essay 'Against Old and New Legends' in this volume for further discussion of this incident of the absurdly sectarian interpretation of the poet János Arany.

literature from Miklós Zrinyi to the present day. This literature is a genuine treasury of works that could educate the masses to social self-consciousness.

Yesterday evening, for example, Tamás Major recited Mihály Vörösmarty's poem, *Thoughts in the Library*; the recitation had revolutionising effects. Hungarian literature has many such poems, short stories, and dramas that, if we interpret them properly, indeed even if we just read them aloud properly, can have a consciousness-building, revolutionising effect. Therefore, we must be careful, so that just as we conduct the most intense struggle against bourgeois kitsch, just as we seek to remove all bourgeois and gentry kitsch from our art, we do not fall into the sectarian spirit on the terrain of art, we do not leave aside that treasure that Hungarian literature represents for us. You need to make this literature your own, in your leisure time familiarising yourself as intimately as possible with the classic, great works; and we will soon see that the better and more deeply you know them, the greater influence they can exercise artistically and politically on the broad masses of the Hungarian people.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Hungarian Theories of Abstract Art<sup>1</sup>

The discussion that follows, here, is not about abstract art itself, but only about its theoretical underpinnings. It is a question to what extent this mode of treatment is justified. It is unquestionably problematic. One cannot explain Racine through Boileau, Zola through Taine, and so on; precisely, I myself have repeatedly expounded the misleading nature of this method. But, even if we reject explaining art on the basis of theories, there persists a certain historical parallelism, a certain degree of intellectual affinity between them, in so far as they arise out of the same social struggles. Indeed, we know of not a few cases in which the artists themselves have strongly protested against a critical explanation of their work (the relation of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky to revolutionary democratic criticism), yet, ultimately, history has borne out the intellectual affinity.

We bring up these great historical examples as a theoretical justification of the proposition that it is legitimate to consider such an artistic theory in itself

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1. In this essay, published in *Forum* in 1947, Lukács criticises two books that reflected and further encouraged postwar Hungarian responses to avant-garde trends in Western art such as surrealism and geometric abstraction: Kállai 1947, and Hamvas 1946. These influential works paralleled the formation of two artist groups, the Európai Iskola [European School] and the Elvont Művészet Csoportja [Abstract Artists' Group], both of which were active between 1946 and 1948. Lukács's essay is one of his rare ventures into the domain of visual arts and reveals his almost complete lack of sympathy with – and one might justly add, full understanding of – the nascent modernistic tendencies that would be programmatically suppressed during the period of Stalinist dictatorship, 1948–53. Ironically, this same period of Soviet-oriented 'cultural revolution' also saw the discrediting of Lukács as a Western-leaning reactionary and his forced isolation from public-intellectual life, a 180-degree turn from the few years when he had been a leading cultural authority for the Communist Party.

as well, as a symptom of the period. Yet, the historical example does not serve as the measure for these critics, it does not indicate the critical rank, least of all in the case of Béla Hamvas.<sup>2</sup> If we are here considering the theoretical works of Ernő Kállai and Béla Hamvas, it is in order to seek the principles that motivate and justify abstract art philosophically. We know, in advance, that after the sharp condemnation that follows here, some artists will reject these theories, if they consider what, thought through to their conclusions, they entail and where they lead. This, however, is far from deciding the following question: whether there is an essential relation between such theoretical argumentation and abstract art's artistic principles and practice. For the antagonism with several centuries of European artistic tradition, which is manifested in the artistic practice of abstract art, it requires a completely different theoretical legitimation from normal style-changes in the different traditions. In order to see the justification of abstract art, we would have to re-evaluate all the basic concepts of previous aesthetics. Indeed – in so far as genuine aesthetics stand in the closest relation with a number of problems in our world-views – all the questions of world-view would have to be re-evaluated as well. It is the value of these books by Kállai and by Hamvas and Katalin Kemény that they attempt this re-evaluation. This also justifies our examining and judging these theoretical foundations on a theoretical level. If these theories – quite divergent from each other – do not cover precisely and at every point the practice of abstract art and the convictions of some of its adherents, there is, nonetheless, something indicative and symptomatic in the fact that they attempt to justify abstract art theoretically, today, in 1947, in this way.

# I

In Hamvas's book, we find the following interesting statement: 'In Eastern Europe, abstraction signified a human comportment; it still means that today and probably will mean that for some time to come'. Let us see what this comportment consists in? Hamvas establishes a new line in Hungarian art-history, the 'seekers after truth': Károly Ferenczy to Lajos Gulácsy to Tivadar Csontváry to Lajos Vajda. What is the essential feature of these 'seekers after truth'? Let us leave Károly Ferenczy out of this business, where he (like the

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2. Hamvas's interest in mysticism and esoteric spirituality led to him being prohibited from publishing and the suppression of his works after 1948. Having fallen into oblivion under socialism, his substantial body of writings have been rediscovered and published following the political changes of 1989. In 1935, Hamvas, along with Károly (Karl) Kerényi, founded the Sziget Kör [Island Circle], which Ádam Tábor describes in a recent article as 'a right-wing anti-fascist group'. – Ádam Tábor, 'Concourse at the Centre', available at: <<http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=en&page=3&id=535>>.

art-history of Lajos Fülep)<sup>3</sup> undeservedly and unjustifiably ended up, nor should we pose the question of whether Hamvas's interpretation of Gulácsy and Csontváry is justified. Here, we should consider only the historical and philosophical foundation of abstract art, the essence of the comportment entailed by artistic abstraction.

The psychological point of departure for this comportment is the psychopathic nature of the true artist, the morally-grounded 'truth-seeker'. Discussing Gulácsy, Hamvas asserts:

Yet, we still must understand that this is not a matter of a clinical case, but, rather, of a comportment characteristic both of the period and of this intensely spiritually demanding person, which, if it finally in fact led to mental disturbance, it was not the mental disturbance that was the important thing, but, rather, something completely different. In any case, it is very curious that in the last century, this case was not at all uncommon. The first such authentic artist-madman was Hölderlin. One can add to the list Schumann, Baudelaire, Gogol, Van Gogh, and Nietzsche, all of whom went mad from an intensive spiritual hunger in an age infinitely impoverished in spirit. And the reason that some avoided going mad was not their greatness, but rather their cautious pettiness, which protected them against intensified demands. This was the case with Goethe. With a little exaggeration, one might say that by mid-century any artist or thinker or poet who was not at least a little infected with madness was suspect.

This conception appears in an even more general theoretical formulation in connection with Csontváry: 'This painting depicts humanity in a condition of spiritual poverty and awkward nostalgia, in an intensive idiocy, eagerly and foolishly expectant. But, precisely from the painting it becomes clear that this spiritual poverty, this idiocy and nostalgia are not some degraded condition, indeed, precisely the contrary. This touching awkwardness is that in which we all live, helpless before the enigma of reality. We are these, all of us, indeed, precisely in our best and highest moments'.

Taken in itself, there is still nothing essentially new here. Since the irrationalistic philosophy that later led to fascism came into being, the essence of the artist has been preferably connected with pathology. Hamvas's characteristic feature is not peculiar to him; his progressively more decadent world-outlook corresponds to the progressively more advanced decay of capitalism, and it culminates in his view that pathology is not just some kind of subjec-

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3. Fülep was a friend and intellectual associate of Lukács in the renowned 'Sunday Circle' during World War I. He was also a close friend of Karl Kerényi in the 1930s. Hamvas and Kemény dedicated *Revolution in the Arts* to Fülep.



tive spiritual trait but, rather, a comportment responding appropriately to the enigmatic essence of reality. 'Primarily, the painting in the first instance does not create a consciousness of the present-day, but rather ascends to some sort of "higher" reality. Many have attempted along other lines in this century, to depict and name this higher sphere of reality. The most appropriate expression to designate is, roughly, the "numinous" ("*numen adest*" – "a higher power is present"), or the "*tremendum*" (the "terrifying"). Against Western Europe's purely and clearly "humanistic" strivings and alongside these, here something "demonic" appears...'. Kállai gives a very similar description of the human comportment manifested in surrealism. 'Behind the grimaces hide extremely, fatally true reality and shock penetrating to the bone, and now and then infinite human loneliness'.

Thus, according to Hamvas, this pathological comportment, this madness is the only appropriate disposition in the face of reality's authentic, hidden, yet, in our time, revealed true nature. A consistent 'seeker after truth' ends in madness; signs of triviality and compromise, if this does not set in – as for example, with Goethe.

Reality thus stands before the 'seeker after truth' as something terrifying and shocking; the 'hidden face' of reality is that Medusa's head which to look upon turns one to stone, plunging the human soul into madness. Yet: what is this reality? Is it the countenance of the age, thus something historical, passing, transitional in nature, or on the contrary, is it the deepest essence of reality, which the differences of changing social and historical forms merely cover over? In our authors – in a not fully considered way, without methodological relation – both answers can be found.

In Hamvas, who, as we shall later see in greater detail, seeks to construct the theory of abstract art with the help of principles and categories of mysticism and especially Eastern mysticism, the response given in the latter direction appears self-evident. According to him, classical humanism implies relinquishing 'humanity's ultimate achievable possibility'. If man transcends humanism, then 'it becomes necessary to conjure up the painting's primordial character'. From this follows – discussed through an ample Eastern mystical terminology – the mystery of the point: 'There is nothing more complete than the point. The point has no properties.... The point is not He. The point is His hiding place. Before He disclosed Himself, there was the point. Who discloses Himself up and conceals Himself? Precisely He, the unnameable and ineffable and unthinkable'. From this, it naturally follows that 'every property is the point's property.... Every step is the point's secret'. This discussion is so clear that it needs no commentary.

In Kállai, the character of this 'eternal' principle appears in a much more concrete and, therefore, much more revealing way. He also seeks a 'cosmic

vision', a 'bio-romantic world of imagination'. But Kállai emphasises, in a very interesting and significant way, the nugatory aspect of the human in it: 'The man of the new romanticism is a vanishing point; he feels himself to be a nothingness in the midst of these vivid, animate forces that not only in his organism and consciousness, but also in the depths of nature and in the vast spaces of the universe issue out as one. Forgetting himself, he plunges into this cosmic flood, in which he desires to blend and be annihilated'. He seeks in this way that which man, animal, and plant have in common, withdrawing from the great path of the humanistic culture begun by the Greeks, which always precisely aimed at that which was specific to man, that which raised humankind out of the ranks of plants and animals. But, however much Kállai strives to leave behind him the 'flat', 'materialist' categories of social and cultural views, he is, nevertheless, ultimately compelled to formulate his opinion in such a way that returns to the so-called 'social Darwinism' of the second half of the previous century, which mechanically transposed to society Darwin's achievements in a degraded and vulgarised form. The fact that Kállai expresses this with a mixture of mystical enrapturement and artistic, coffeehouse self-irony nonetheless lends his thoughts no claim on originality: 'In the ranks of plants and animals, even of seeds and cells, there are those who endure and those who bite.'<sup>4</sup> There, too, the more powerful run the weak down to the end; life there too is pushiness and insecurity, mere ravenous desire, cunning ambush and dissimulation. Even in the womb of our mother-Earth, the eternal tragicomedy of man lurks'.

Nevertheless, in Kállai's formulation, although unconsciously and without being thought-through, the social background of the comportment described here comes to the surface: capitalist society, specifically that of today's imperialist form that grows over into fascism. A Darwinism inflated into a social philosophy, even into a 'cosmic world-view', applied in an uncritical, metaphysical way to society, necessarily spills over into the description of capitalist society. More than a half-century ago, Engels wrote thus: 'Darwin did not know what a bitter satire he wrote on mankind, and especially on his countrymen, when he showed that free competition, the struggle for existence, which the economists celebrate as the highest historical achievement, is the normal state of the *animal kingdom*'.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Kallai here plays on an untranslatable Hungarian proverb, *Aki birja marja*, 'He who endures gets to bite', meaning something akin to 'All things come to those who wait'.

5. From Engels's introduction in 1883 to *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels 1940.

Of course, with the coming of fascism and World War II, this 'normal condition' reached such a degree that a stylisation of it into a cosmic experience, if it prepared to formulate its own basis and object, stumbled upon shock, madness, 'tremendum' in Hamvas's sense.

Besides, Hamvas himself relates to this new situation in a relatively friendlier, more appreciative, almost, one might say, more 'sociological' way. Similar to the fashionable, counter-revolutionary, journalistic writing in the West, he sees fascism and communism as one in his light of cosmic illumination, and grasps both together as part of a collective epoch whose necessary, expressive forms are surrealism and abstract art:

The individualisation of common life in every case is thus registered in the arts by the art-work's loss of the characteristic of the *tremendum*, thus becoming a sensuous object of individual enjoyment, in conformity to which art shifts towards sensuous (realistic) depiction and becomes a sensory spectacle.

The collectivisation of the individualised system of life is, in contrast, everywhere registered in the arts by a casting off of the art-work's character as a mere spectacle for the senses; it withdraws from the sensuous mode of depiction (from realism), and that which was previously merely an object of craft now becomes a magical *tremendum* that addresses us. In conformity to this, art shifts towards imaginative depiction.

There is no exception to this lawfulness.

The 'tremendum', the horror leading to madness, appears in Hamvas as the highest positive value. In this regard, Kállai reacts in a much more humane fashion to the new reality that fascism and World War II created. He derives the surrealist outlook directly from the intensive experience of the monstrosities of this reality: 'It is not accidental that the bold somersaults of surrealist fantasy, parodistic association of ideas that mockingly flash together human, animal, and plant, overrun the modern galleries of Western metropolises, in this time in which the antagonism between classes reaches its ultimate intensity, when the bourgeois system is already beginning to come apart at its individualist seams, and the monopoly capitalism preparing imperialist invasion attempts, with fascism, to deceive the masses with its last, terrible, camouflaged means...when every pure human ideal is shamelessly twisted from its original meaning and stood on its head.'

How, then, are the cosmic and social sides of these two theories related to each other? The answer is very simple if we consider Kállai's last analysis and statement not as an expression of the author's intention, but merely as a subjective declaration; if we view it not as an explanation but, rather, as that

which must be explained. In other words, we should not simply see in it the reflection in thought and feeling of the fascist world, but, rather, also ask: *who* sees things in this way, *who* experiences fascism in this way? It is not worth wasting many words here on the leaders and supporters of the fascist system; for them, the time of this reign of terror was Paradise. But it is equally certain that dedicated opponents of fascism reflected this system in a different way from that described by Kállai. These, more or less clearly, saw those economic and social forces that brought about fascism; their consciousness – in registering the horrors – strove to recognise the occasioning causes, and their struggle was directed, more or less consciously, toward the elimination of these causes. The world-outlook of the soldier of the Red Army, of the French or Yugoslavian partisan, and so on, corresponded in not a single point with the world described by Kállai.

If, however, we make these caveats, we see whose world-picture this is that Kállai seeks to describe partially with cosmic, partially with social, philosophical ambitions. Clearly, it is that of the petty bourgeoisie and especially of that element of the intelligentsia that occasionally revolted against the anti-cultural manifestations of capitalism. But this was only a spontaneous resistance: on the one hand, it grasped the development of modern society in an abstract and distorted fashion ('modern civilisation, industrial mass-production and modern, dictatorial mass-politics reduce the human being to an impersonal atom, to a mere instrument, a mere number'); on the other hand, it took part in the ideological transformation of that irrationalist tendency beginning with Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Bergson that finally issued out into the fascist 'world-view'. Therefore, it faced, uncomprehendingly and helplessly, all the horror whose economic basis was the monopoly-capitalism that it had not understood, and whose ideology was provided by, precisely, the beloved, honoured masters of this sort of thinking.

It is very characteristic of this sort of intellectual that he ruled out, from the outset, any rational investigation of the question of fascism and the World War, any research into its causes. Kállai expresses very clearly this intellectual comportment:

Historical materialism has no such explanation that would be able to let us grasp at root how an enlightened, cultured humanity could sink to such murderous unbridledness and dedication to war. For the motivations beneath the 'real-political' situations and beneath the goals of the economy and the regime are finally obliged to stop short before the thick, bloodthirsty wilderness of the instincts of possession and power. Since Cain, men have beaten, trampled, and killed one another, yet, nevertheless – this is the eternal, pitiless irony of human nature – in many cases, in the name of very high-falutin, rights, principles, and, even, ideals. In man, the light of spirit

and intellect wrestles with the darkness of a demonic underworld. In the final instance, this demonic side accounts for the catastrophic 'excesses' of history.

In what follows, Kállai embeds this view of society in a cosmic world-view: 'Man is not only a "*zoon politikon*", that is, a political animal, as Aristotle stated. He is not simply a function and mover of social relations, but, rather, in a more originary sense, an outgrowth of nature, existing at one with plants and animals. These biological root-hairs tie him inseparably to the deep world of organic life'. Of course, this is more a statement than a proof, especially because, as we demonstrated above, behind the cosmic vision for him – unconsciously – the social reality of monopoly-capitalism is hidden. And the helplessness follows from this sort of intellectual's conception that is unable, but especially unwilling, to change the social situation although he senses its profound problems. Although he sublimates the world's horror to fundamental principles of world-view and the philosophy of art, although he goes into 'voluntary spiritual exile', nevertheless he somehow internally makes his home in this horrible world; and he finds himself more at home in this banishment, among the nightmarish visions that haunt it, than in the world of those who struggle to make these horrors disappear from the world. Kállai, notably, says of this comportment, that it wishes 'neither to serve nor attack' this world.

All this is even more clearly visible in Hamvas. Let us recall his analysis of Csontváry. Here, he announces that the world depicted is such that one would, in fact, have to revolt against it. (Of course, in Hamvas, revolt is limited to the style of Ivan Karamazov.)<sup>6</sup> Yet, the comportment of the true 'seeker after truth' is not Karamazov-like: 'Yet, it would not occur to anyone that he should explain this mass of ghosts in terms of revolt and, thus, himself rebel. He who understands this picture becomes at once truly meek, even very submissive'.

We see that, here, it is a matter of a comportment that extends beyond the boundaries of the purely aesthetic. All the more so, because both of these books were written after the collapse of fascism (Kállai's in the autumn of 1945, Hamvas's – as the examples indicate – still later). The questions of liberation and of the construction of a people's democracy occasion no change in our authors' view of the appropriate comportment towards the world. For their part, the world – the unity of cosmic and social principles – is today as much a world of the 'tremendum', of terror, of dread, as it was under fascism. This should be a thought-provoking fact for anyone: how can this be? Especially for those abstract artists who declare themselves in their social outlook

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6. Dostoyevsky's passionate, nihilistic, and rationalist protagonist in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

to be committed to progress, who do not, like Kállai, consider the principle of progress to be 'blind faith', and who do not think, like him, that the 'voluntary exile' that was humanly understandable conduct during the time of fascism, remains, today, the sole conduct worthy of the true artist, of the true man of spirit.

## II

Philosophical justification of art has to go this far in order to explain why the 'truth-seeking' artist – whether surrealist or abstract – needs to discard the arts of representing objects and animating figures that have predominated since the Greeks.

Of course, for our authors, the concrete philosophical reasoning is very different. Hamvas's is a relatively simple case. His world-view is determined by that modern snobbery that made fashionable the categories of Eastern mysticism in modern cafés and salons. Only in our country does such snobbery have – comparatively – the value of a rarity. In the West, this was a tendency that has been familiar for decades, widely disseminated, and – by serious people – derided. Justly, because these categories only have their (subjective) value in a truly religious, honourably ascetic comportment. Separated from the terrain of this ascetic religiosity, all these terms of art become empty phraseology. These phrases serve only one goal: to help those who are disinclined to think epistemological and aesthetic questions scientifically to a conclusion, to get beyond otherwise insoluble problems by means of a convenient, apparently conceptual *salto mortale*. Aided by the use of a mystical vocabulary, they represent as 'depth' that mumbo-jumbo by which they circumvent real problems. Hamvas's Eastern mysticism serves this goal as well. The point, the circle, and so on, like some mystical, primordial perfection, like something that points far beyond the vulgarly sensory forms of objectivity, are, thus, most convenient to justify because they are in no way justified.

Kállai progresses towards the same goal on different pathways. He imagines that the method of the modern sciences of nature offer a persuasive analogy to the non-objectivity of abstract art, its character of pointing beyond the sensory world. According to him, the object of abstract art is 'the hidden face of nature', and this is what hides behind phenomena. Let us look at a few explications in reference to this:

What occurred to modern art intuitively, its new vision of space, stands in a truly profound, spiritual parallelism with the world-picture of modern atomic physics and the unity of space-time in it... Out of the old atom, 'bundles of waves' emerged. In the same manner, in modern art, the

solid, plastic qualities of material and mass that served to distinguish the represented object from space, in other words, those qualities of objectivity that the earlier tradition of depiction clung to, were suspended. Instead of objects, the new art depicts manifestations of colour and structure, figures of sense and movement, passing over into one another; from these a deeper, more spiritual picture of reality shines forth.

Summarising, he thus expounds his conception:

‘Natural science also strives to look through the thick fabric of the divine veil. With the help of delicate analytical methods and micro- and X-ray photography, as well as of machines for filming, the mind of the researcher probes into and reveals nature’s most concealed secrets....Already, today, in the new life, we return to that old wisdom according to which an *ideal potentiality* appears in nature. In our time, the greatest natural scientists and mathematicians are inspired by the certainty that a spiritually creative power gives tendencies and laws to the figure and fate of the universe....This recognition newly indicates those supersensory, transcendental backgrounds that the materialism of the previous century wanted at all costs to disregard

From here, Kállai’s already mentioned bio-romantic world-view comes into being.<sup>7</sup>

If we now look more closely at this theory, from which I have quoted in such detail here as, perhaps, to wear upon the patience of my reader, a number of important things become immediately clear.

First and foremost, Kállai believes that he has expounded the standpoint of modern natural science, whereas, in reality, he has only offered idealistic, philosophical interpretations that twist and distort the methods and achievements of modern natural science. He has merely vulgarised those philosophies that have sought to exploit the modern natural sciences for reactionary, ideological goals. The framework of this article does not allow a thorough exposition of this. Only to one philosophically-decisive viewpoint is it necessary to call attention. It is not true that it follows from the modern natural sciences that – in opposition to the old ‘materially-based natural sciences’ – a return begins to be made to that ‘old wisdom, according to which an *ideal potentiality* appears in nature’. Of course, reactionary philosophers announce this today, but they can only do this because, epistemologically, they unjustifiably mix together the general philosophical conception of matter with the prevailing, concrete, physical formulation of it. In Lenin’s work, the philosophical determination

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7. For Kállai’s concept of ‘bio-romanticism’, see his 1932 German-language essay ‘Bioromantik’, in Kállai 2006, pp. 124–30.

of matter received its definitive form: matter is that which exists independently of consciousness. In this frame, science always approaches the true, concrete structure and laws of matter with ever-new knowledge, methods, etc. From this, however, follows the fact that the modern discovery of the structure of the atom in no way can alter the philosophical determination of matter: the proton, ion, wave, etc. – in so far these are equally independent of consciousness as the atom itself – are in no way any less material than it. The idealistic interpretation of modern natural science is thus the use of epistemological dilettantism for the goals of the reactionary philosophy fashionable today. Kállai's analogy in this way does not refer to nature itself; the fundamentally misleading conception rooted in the fashionable popularisation of natural science is the sole basis for the analogy.

This falsity of course is not limited to the most general epistemological issues, to the opposition of materialism and idealism, but, rather, extends to the whole circle of problems taken up here. In this connection, we can raise a single question: the relation of phenomenon and law, phenomenon and essence. Here, too, Kállai faithfully follows presently fashionable, reactionary philosophy's explications of natural science, and, correspondingly, there emerges the situation that, as he presents it, the modern discoveries of the natural sciences tear the sciences away from the reality immediately given to us, of which Galilean and Newtonian classical mechanics, Euclidian geometry, etc. in their time provided mirror-images in thought. This is incorrect; indeed, it is a twisting of scientific facts. The natural sciences are always explanations of phenomena, striving to achieve the most perfect approximation of their regularities. And, in pursuit of this goal, they distance themselves a great deal from the phenomena's immediately given forms, in which they manifest themselves in our perception. Yet, this distancing in no way implies a break with the phenomena, or an antagonism with them. On the contrary, it is a matter of an indirect route that, in the end, always returns to the phenomena, now more perfectly understood in their regularities. In fact, it returns not only to those features of phenomena that can be subsumed under general laws, but also to their particular and, even, to their singular characteristics.

Kállai and those who uncritically take up the reactionary interpretations of modern natural science that have come into existence under the influence of the imperialist age conceive these matters as if the physics that arose in consequence of the discoveries of Max Planck and Albert Einstein had cast off Galilean and Newtonian classical mechanics, as if absolute geometry destroyed the validity of Euclidian geometry. (This dilettantish and reactionary conception started with Oswald Spengler.) In truth, certain theories (for example, classical mechanics) that, in their time, were seen to encompass the explanatory laws of all phenomena, in the course of the development of the natural



sciences, came before us as special cases of more comprehensive, more general regularities.

But, all this is just the prelude of Kállai's errors. The most fundamental mistake of his theory is that – again under the influence of the reactionary philosophy of the imperialist age – in his search for an analogy, he simply identifies the relations of science and of art to reality. It is true, both are reflections of reality in our consciousness. But there are fundamental differences between these two kinds of reflections. Scientific knowledge aims to grasp reality in its being *an-Sich*. It, thus, eliminates every anthropomorphic viewpoint; all its methods and concept-construction aim, rather, to detach the particular, human, receptive capacities of the person confronting nature from the objective determinations of objects, so that science can, thus, represent nature as it exists objectively, independent of man. Hence, distantiation from the phenomenon towards lawfulness and essence; and hence, the characteristic feature of the scientific return to the phenomenon: the most precise circumscription of the place, structure, qualities, etc. of the phenomenon in the most comprehensive context of laws.

From art, in contrast, one can never detach the person, along with his senses. The world depicted by art is always a human world. Even if – viewed externally – nature alone is depicted. The fundamental relation of man to nature, the mediation between man and nature effected by social activity (in the last instance: the development of productive forces), cannot, on principle, be eliminated from the determination of the objects of art and from the mode of their depiction. Landscape, still life, and so on, are social and human, not natural categories. (The development of productive forces determines the development of the natural sciences as well, but, in so far as, here, efforts aim at acquiring knowledge of nature's objective essence independent of human consciousness, precisely the unfolding of the forces of production creates the foundation for science's disengagement from anthropomorphic categories.) The external and internal boundaries of art, the possibilities for absorption within these boundaries, the possible expansion of these boundaries, etc. are always determined by human perception. In scientific optics, for a long time already, infrared and ultraviolet rays have been considered together on a single plane with the colours of the spectrum; the further development of physics is setting the whole of optics in an ever more comprehensive and unified context. Such development cannot affect the visual arts. For it, only the world visible with the human eye is available. Even if – as in abstract art – the efforts of artists and aestheticians aim to go beyond the world given to their senses, in their *concrete depiction* they, too, are unable to go beyond the forms and colours visible through the human eye.

This fundamental fact determines the particular relation of phenomenon and essence (law) in art, which in principle diverges from that in the sciences. While it is unquestionable that the creative process of any serious artist also aims at the essence, at lawful regularity, it is equally certain that in the work of art itself, this quest inevitably turns back towards the phenomenon, in such a way, moreover, that essence and law do not appear in relatively autonomous form (as in the sciences), but, rather, mould themselves to the shape of the phenomenon's characteristics. Art always depicts the sensory and intellectual, organic totality of phenomenon and essence. The singular phenomenon – without losing its individual and one-time quality, indeed with this being reinforced and intensified – becomes the bearer of essence and the depository of law. That which in scientific thought appears as the final outcome of analysis and synthesis – the dialectical unity of the singular, the particular, and the general – in the arts takes the form of a sensuous, phenomenal unity.

Both Kállai and Hamvas strive to shatter this unity, the specificity of the work of art that is art's eternal justification, ensuring it an equal rank beside the sciences, so as to establish the object of art as something transcending the phenomenon, something supersensory. Kállai protests against the 'excessive dominance of the senses'. Concluding the line of thought that we discussed above, he asserts, 'This hidden countenance of reality that has deeper origins cannot be given form in the usual manner of the human figure and face, nor that of landscape or still life. The eyes of the soul summon up *universal views*, and it is even less possible to capture these through objective depiction aimed always only at each detail, than it is to exhaust the ocean's water with a spoon. Such universal views cannot be depicted, only *intimated*. Indeed, through painterly or sculptural *signs*'.

Kállai does not see that to intimate with the help of signs (namely, some kind of determinate thing, or as he would have it, a newly-recognised world-correlation) is impossible. The sign is precisely a sign because, and in so far as, it signifies something precisely determinate, as, for example, in the old Eastern pictographic script. The triangle in geometry is an object not a sign (especially in so far as we set aside the contingent sensual particulars in which it appears); it is an object whose properties, relations, laws, and so on we analyse. The triangle painted or drawn with artistic intention, in contrast, is a sensuous phenomenon, which although sensory – and from an artistic point of view, precisely because of this – is a phenomenon that exhibits a much poorer, less concrete determinateness than does a tree or an apple; but precisely like those, it is a sensuous phenomenon, which stands in a sensuous relation with the other phenomena depicted with it, and it may be related to those only through artistic means (drawing, colour, rhythm, and so on). In so far as I take it as a sign, I give it an *arbitrary meaning* that my viewer may discover or not, depending

on whether he is initiated into the artist's subjective intention, into that which does not appear sensually in the triangle. In no case can this depicted triangle – in its own sensuous pictorial quality – in any way stipulate the content and bearing of the 'intimation'.

Here, again, Kállai falls victim to his own misleading theory, the false analogy constituted on the model of scientific research. Of course, one can look at and enjoy the inner structure of certain plants, certain slides under the microscope, x-ray images, etc. from a decorative standpoint. It is, likewise, easily possible that certain of these views might inspire the creation of abstract art or of an applied art with decorative intent (such as fabric-design). But we must be clear that what comes into existence here has nothing at all in common with the 'hidden face of nature'. This may be (for instance, fabric) pleasing and novel, but the 'intimation' that arises here is nothing other than the provoking of arbitrary associations, different in content for each viewer.

The hidden face of nature appears where the lawfulness of man's social and human being is present in the artistically sensualised phenomenon at once in its sensuous power, when it rises to the surface, making the essence phenomenal. The hidden face of nature is directly present in Greek sculpture and in Rembrandt's portraits, but it has nothing in common with 'intimations' given through 'signs'. If Kállai wishes to leap over the 'detour' that he thinks 'objective depiction means', then he wants to leap over art itself.

If someone has listened to Kállai's and Hamvas's reasoning up to this point, involuntarily the old anecdote comes to mind in which a litigant has presented his side of the case to the judge. Summing up matters, the judge says, 'Judged from what you have said, you are not right. I'm waiting to hear whether or not your opponent can add something to your advantage'.

Luckily, for the theoreticians of abstract art, this opponent is indeed present: it is the dull theory and practice of naturalism. This theory and practice has brought the real depiction of the real phenomena of nature into such disrepute, drawing around it such a tortuous atmosphere of deadly boredom, that the more demanding artists and connoisseurs instinctively flee from this soulless world. And, if often they naively believe that if they can only choose between such 'faithfulness to nature', such 'depiction of reality', and the theory propounded by Kállai and Hamvas, they quite easily choose the latter.

In reality, however, this choice is not at all necessary. I have spoken, in other contexts, exhaustively about the fact that what the Marxist theory of art calls realism has nothing in common with naturalism; thus, I consider it superfluous to return to this question in detail. It is necessary only to call the reader's attention to one point closely related to this question: the issue of abstraction. Lack of theoretical clarity about this issue today confuses many people into adopting an incorrect position.

Kállai and Hamvas view this question as self-evident to such a degree that they hardly waste more than a few remarks on it. They consider it self-evident that abstraction is the spiritual characteristic of the view they represent, which transcends the crudely sensuous realm. On the other hand, the coarse empiricism of the naturalists rejects every abstraction from the domain of art.

But matters stand in a completely different fashion. First and foremost, abstraction is not imported from some artistic or human comportment into the conception of reality, but rather precisely the opposite: it comes from objective reality into art's way of seeing. Abstraction is such a process that is ceaselessly produced and reproduced by life, without which life, especially human life, and human society would not be possible. It suffices, perhaps, if we emphasise that every word is an abstraction, be it the most common expression of everyday life, like house, table, dog. This, however, is only possible because objective reality itself, independent of thought, stipulates those concepts that emphasise the common traits of things and groups of things, etc. otherwise obtained only by abstraction in thought. Thought only mirrors this structure, this procession and process of reality, and only progressing in this way can reality's hidden face be more nearly approached.

Every true artist carries out this work as well. The more deeply he penetrates into the animation of the phenomena, the more seriously he will have to take the work of abstraction. Namely in two directions. On the one hand, in going beyond the surface-phenomenality that is immediately given in his senses; and on the other hand, and this especially, in utilising the knowledge and experience thus acquired for the artistic sensualisation of the phenomena, in which – not bursting but enriching the phenomenality of the phenomenon – essence, law, the hidden face of man and nature are present, come to appearance. It is superficial to oppose the process of abstraction to the world of artistic sensuality. The poet's words, even if they reach the highest degree of sensuality in images, sequencing, rhythm, and music, stand, at the same time, at the peak of abstraction, because, in the perceived phenomenon, he fuses into an organic unity the general, the particular, and the singular. So, too, with the artist: colour, line, contrast of shade, modelling, and so on may be the means of expression and the bearer of both superficial copying and far-reaching abstraction.

In this way, there is abstraction and there is abstraction. Precisely if – as we did above – we establish that objective reality has already objectively carried out the process of abstraction, it is clear that not every artistic abstraction is of equal value, rather, what determines its significance and value is where it aims and what it achieves; what is its content and what is its objectiveness? In short: it is possible to abstract in the direction of the deeper inter-relations

of reality, namely, by means of the process of abstraction to approach reality ever more closely, but it is also possible through the process of abstraction to distance oneself ever more from reality. It is just an obstacle to productive debate around today's art if the question is thus posed: are we for or against abstraction? Rather, we should ask: abstraction of what genre, tendency, intensity, content, and so on is necessary for art to express adequately man's relation – produced in social development – to nature, to human beings, to himself?

Capitalism has disintegrated this relation, beginning with the formation of monopoly-capitalism, especially at that degree of which humanity had to live through under fascism and in the World War. How this social situation was reflected in the thought and affective life of those who strive theoretically to formulate the principles of abstract art, we have already discussed at length in this article. Let us now consider how this comportment affects the question of abstraction.

The rational abstraction, to make use of Marx's expression, is the abstraction that aims at grasping the essence of the present object and giving this essence adequate sensuous expression, assuming the, at least, potential, identifiable comprehensibility of the human world. If the objective, external world were, indeed, only incomprehensible chaos, there would be no question of essence or law, and, thus, abstraction would have no meaning. In relation to art, however, it is certain that in such a world, no sort of generalisation could be referred back to the sensory phenomena, could be made apparent in it.

Yet, the theoreticians of abstract art start with the apotheosis of a behaviour that conceives of the external world as an incomprehensible, inhuman, beastly chaos, and which finds some meaning, at best, in some mystical, supersensory principle or some cosmically styled distortion of science. Fundamentally considered, however, this 'meaning' is not referable to the true human world, to this world's phenomena and laws, in which human life takes its course, and whose formation determine the forms and contents of human life. Thus, in such theories, everything stands on its head. In Kállai, the objective results of natural-scientific investigation of reality are subjectivised into decorative patterns, occasions for mere 'intimation'. On the other hand, in Hamvas, colour is objective, puffed up into a metaphysical principle independent of man (blue is 'always blue, a uniform and fatally thick, massive, homogeneous blue up to the centre of the Earth'). The most striking theoretical expression of the distortion of the human, the twisting of the relation between man and society, between man and world, is that the subjective element receives expression in thought as an objective one, while the objective appears subjective. 'The picture should be the seer, and the man who stands before it should be the seen', writes Hamvas.

Of course, neither the artist nor the art theorist invented this distortion. This distortion, mutilation, and disintegration of man, this twisting of his relation to the external world, are the products of social forces. And, in so far as important facts of objective development are at issue, here, it is clear that neither the artist nor the thinker can turn away from asserting, explaining, making apparent to the senses, depicting this context. Herein lie the social roots of abstract art and its theory. Everyone can, and must, well understand if this frenzy of anti-humanity produces deep bitterness, wild rage, bitter irony in decent people. And it can, and must, be understood if the despair occasioned in this way manifests itself in desperate forms; if the artist who has socially lost ground, expresses the objective destruction of man with subjectively form- and object-destroying means; if he reacts to the monstrosity of the world just as once did who, in anger, helped the hailstones destroy his crops, saying: 'Look, Lord God, what the two of us can do together'.

We have already, however, alluded to the fact that this is not the complete social reality, but, rather, it is merely the reflection of social reality in the heads of certain persons who disseminate certain world-views from particular class-perspectives. The fascist period was not only a time of bestial horror, but also of superhuman heroism and self-sacrifice; it was not only a time of world-destruction, but also of world regeneration. Of this latter, nothing is seen by the theorists of abstract art. In an apparent paradox, but, in fact, with deep, objective, historical necessity – precisely through their one-sided praise of abstraction – they remain at the surface, failing to abstract towards the essential.

They did not see this relation even when the hellish world of fascism collapsed, when the powers seeking to build a world worthy of man became stronger than the anti-human powers, when – despite difficult struggles – the construction of the new world had begun, the construction of the new world of human beings discovering themselves in their humanity. In this way, in turn, these theories lost that – relative – comprehensibility of which we spoke a little while ago. When, in the period of fascism's preparation and reign, Kállai, Hamvas, and those in agreement with them puffed up a relatively, subjectively understandable comportment into a cosmic principle and, along with that, into the basic principle of true art, they abstracted away from the essence of reality, abstracting themselves into Nothingness.

September 1947

## Chapter Fourteen

# **The Hungarian Communist Party and Hungarian Culture<sup>1</sup>**

Lecture at the Hungarian Communist Party's Political Academy, 1948

Three years of revolutionary transformation is a great span of time. Already, Lenin established that, in such periods of progress, the masses could learn and experience in weeks, or even days, what would otherwise take decades. Thus, we feel justified in summarising the progress made after three years and briefly sketching out some perspectives.

Friend and foe alike will acknowledge that, without the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP<sup>2</sup>), the impulse to knock down and build during these three years would have been unimaginable. Whether we consider the facts of the economic construction – the setting in order of public transportation, the erection of buildings and bridges, and so on; or consider the clearing away of open and latent counter-revolutionary forces from public life; or consider the concentration of progressive forces – workers' unity, the workers' and peasants' co-operatives, the formation of the people's front: we get the same picture. Such signs of transformation taking place at such a tempestuous pace provide the true basis for the – more

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1. The essay originally appeared in print in *Forum* 3, 5 (1948): 343–58, and in Lukács 1948c, pp. 11–33.

2. *Magyar Kommunista Párt* [Hungarian Communist Party]. Throughout the essay, abbreviated as MKP.

narrow – posing of our question: how does that which the MKP has encouraged and created, relate to Hungarian culture – especially to the transformations of it now in preparation? What is new here, productively new? What connects organically with the great tradition of Hungarian history? But, also, what stands firmly opposed to the traditions of the last century, and demands a turn, a radical break with these traditions?

These are great, comprehensive, ramifying questions. In order to work at least their essence into the narrow framework of a lecture, it is necessary to occupy ourselves exclusively with culture in a narrowly conceived sense. We will only be able to speak about culture's true bases, about material culture, about its ideological influences, and about the reciprocal relations of politics and culture, to the degree that they are absolutely indispensable from the point of view of the questions taken up here.

## I

Let us begin with personal experiences, so as to sketch out briefly and easily the general atmosphere in which we have posed our questions. Since my return to our country, I have had many conversations with those who live here. What, in the comportment represented by the Communists, do these countrymen find alien, offensive, or alarming? Succinctly put, it is the sharpness of our principles, our pitiless facing of reality, and our unsparing statement of what we see, even if we shatter the loveliest dreams, even if it results in a break with our best friends and with our own past. An excellent poet explicitly called this comportment inhumane, with humane conceived as holding on to old friends and comrades in arms – even if these have, in the meantime, turned politically and intellectually into enemies. A student in the Peasants' Party expressed a similar mood of rejection thus: it is no good to be in the company of Communists, because one cannot lament the fate of the Hungarian people. Not only are they intellectually too sharp and rationalistic for this, they are also offensively optimistic.

That which I have reproduced here from arbitrarily selected, individual conversations also appears in every domain of public life. We are called violent, because we always want to carry our principles out in practice; opportunists, because we were disinclined immediately to start a struggle for every point of our programme if, from the point of view of the people's universal interests, we considered this struggle premature; dreamers, or even adventurers, because – committing all our power – we took on such tasks which at that time everyone believed impossible (just think of the stabilisation in 1946).



Thus the Communists' comportment struck Hungary as oppositional and – in its oppositional character – as alien, in the first instance, of course, in Hungarian intellectual circles. One question, however: is the Communist world-view and comportment really a foreign element in Hungarian culture?

Yes, it is indeed alien if, without further qualification, we identify the achievements of the period following the defeat of the 1848 Revolution, and especially of the last few decades, with Hungarian culture; if these define the possibilities and perspective of Hungarian culture. But, if we look at this question not from the perspective of the recent past but from that of the future, we get a radically different picture. The view towards the future in no way, of course, signifies the denial of the past, least of all, of the whole past. It just implies a completely different, completely new evaluation and arrangement of the past, and in this process, Communist ideology has and will have its own role.

## II

Now, let us select an objective motif from Hungarian cultural development. Apparently here, too, I remain subjective, in so far as I touch upon an issue especially close to me. Yet, soon, it will emerge in the course of this discussion that, here, one of the central questions of culture, of Hungarian culture, is at stake.

It is characteristic of Hungarian culture that there is absolutely no Hungarian philosophy. There is great Hungarian literature that – especially in lyric poetry – is of equal rank with the literature of the great European peoples. Our modern music plays a leading role throughout the whole world. Our visual arts have already for a long time been European in their quality. On the terrain of our natural sciences, mathematics, even the historical sciences, we have made accomplishments that have a place on a world-scale. However, there has been no such Hungarian-philosophical thinker – within our borders – who could be counted even just decent second-rate.

This situation is reflected even in our linguistic development. Since the two great renewals of our language (the reform-period and the journal *Nyugat*), the Hungarian language could adequately express anything that is necessary to depict the world graspable with the senses and to the registration of the world of moods and feelings. However, both linguistic renewals – especially the latter – left almost untouched the forging of the life of thought into words. Anyone who wishes to philosophise in the Hungarian language and on the qualitative level of the world's progressive thought will have insuperable problems with even the most primitive, even the most self-evident technical terms

in the genuine world-languages. Not to mention the philosophical weave of phrases related to more complicated and delicate questions. *Nyugat's* linguistic renewal created a new language only for the impressionistic, lyrical essay, and in this way broke a path for the smooth introduction, between the two revolutions, of anti-intellectual irrationalism into the Hungarian language. For thought seeking to research and generalise about true, serious, and objective reality, however, *Nyugat's* linguistic renewal did not signify anything.

In our country, some would like to conceal this fact. The most comfortable way to do this is by nominating mediocre, or downright bad, philosophical bureaucrats and chair-holders as serious thinkers (for example: Ákos Pauer). This, of course, in reality changes nothing.

Here, the professional history of philosophy does not interest us. What is at issue is philosophy's productive effect on culture, the reciprocal relations of philosophy and national culture. And, seen in this light, such honorific nomination is useless. That which Descartes or Diderot meant to French culture, Kant or Hegel to German culture, Belinsky or Chernyshevsky to Russia culture, has no equivalent in our country, not even a distant analogy. Indeed, even a need in this direction did not really emerge.

### III

To what degree can we speak, here, of national traits? A large literature exists about Hungarian national traits. I will highlight from this an attempt that is of high quality in its thinking and in good faith morally. Mihály Babits says this about the Hungarian national character:

The first character-trait is the sober, objective realism of the Hungarian people; but, now, we should call attention to the fact that this realism is not a practical trait, like for example the realism of the English, but, rather, one of *contemplation*. It is a realism of seeing, and the Hungarian is precisely that man who lazily stands in the gate, smoking, looking about. . . . But, precisely, his seeing much and seeing clearly makes him indifferent towards activity: a certain intelligence and scepticism is cultivated by this, which is deeper than something purely rational and intellectual: it filters down from views and experiences and in the majority of cases is not at all conscious: but all the more powerful are its roots in feeling.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Babits 1978, pp. 232–69, 254.

Babit's statement is typical and is accepted by many. The relation between 'realism' and inactivity, as a Hungarian character-trait, should particularly be emphasised. Naturally, there are numerous statements about the Hungarian-national character that go in the other direction. Especially worthy of emphasis is that line of thought which leads from aimless and senseless activity originating in daydreaming to the activity-inhibiting consequences of reverie (that is, to an irresolvable opposition of dream and reality). I will illustrate the major outlines of this line with just a couple of examples. This development goes from the gypsy-leader Csóri in János Arany's *The Gypsies of Nagyida*, through János Vajda's *The Hero of Mirages* and Count Pongrác in Kálmán Mikszáth's *The Siege of Beszterce* to the characters in Gyula Krúdy who stray into irreality.<sup>4</sup> It presents, in this sort of aimless daydreaming, the Hungarian type, the essence of Hungarian national fate.

In his most mature work, one of the greatest and most thoughtful Hungarian writers, Zsigmond Kemény, sought to make perceptible the Hungarian fate with the polar opposition of these two types. Here Werbőczy's unreal world of imagination is exactly as representative in the rendering of this fate as is Martinuzzi's 'Realpolitik', in principle lacking in principles.<sup>5</sup> In the pamphlets he wrote after the 1848 Revolution, Zsigmond Kemény laid the foundations of the whole Hungarian conservative, reactionary historical conception and its journalism. Until the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, that which he had written at the beginning of the 1850s simply got watered down. But, even afterwards – of course, with changes according to the period – this was the basis of the reigning conception of the nation. In the development of the official Hungarian literature, the opposition of Werbőczy and Martinuzzi has the same significance; the usual oppositions of Kossuth and Széchenyi or Kossuth and Görgey, or even of Petőfi and Arany, can, in many respects, be traced

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4. 'A Nagyidai Cigánok [The Gypsies of Nagyida]', 1851, a poem by János Arany (1817–82); 'A délibábok hőse [The Hero of the Mirages]', 1873, a novel in verse by János Vajda (1827–97); *Beszterce Ostroma* ['The Siege of Beszterce'], 1896, a novel by Kálmán Mikszáth; Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933), considered one of the masters of Hungarian modern prose.

5. In his historical novel *Zord idő* (1862), Kemény contrasted two important historical players of the early 16th century: István Werbőczy (1458–1541), a governing figure and jurist in the Hungarian kingdom, responsible for putting down the peasant-revolt led by György Dózsa in 1514 and instituting a legal code that helped entrench the power of the aristocracy; and George Martinuzzi (Georg Utiessenovicz-Martinuzzi, 1482–1551), diplomat, archbishop, and cardinal. Martinuzzi was a crucial mediator in Central Europe between the Turkish sultan and the Spanish monarchs. Kemény's presentation is concerned with the *failure* of these seemingly able figures to grasp the movements of history; his novel sets out to retrospectively explain the presence of the Turkish occupiers in the palace built by the great Hungarian ruler Matthias Corvinus in Buda only a few decades earlier.

back to this psychological schema created by Kemény. One can gauge how deep an effect this opposition has had by the fact that its final traces are still detectable in the Transylvanian trilogy of Zsigmond Móricz, in which Móricz sets Gábor Báthory and Gábor Bethlen in opposition to one another.<sup>6</sup>

In this opposition, the relation of the two polar types to reality and practice stands out. The daydreaming type is full of principles and general convictions, which, it turns out, have nothing to do with reality; between principle and reality there is an oppositional duality that can be neither overcome nor resolved. The sharp-sightedness of Zsigmond Kemény's view of the national psychology also reveals itself in the fact that he gives the daydreaming type, Werbőczy, the ideology of a lawyer, who seeks – hopelessly – to impose those principles onto reality, to set the historical legal system against historical reality. 'Realpolitik', in contrast, appears exclusively as a clever, cunning thinking that abandons every principle to exploit the constellations of the moment. Despite this, this type – from Martinuzzi to Gábor Bethlen – also features in Hungarian literature as a tragic, fallible type, apparently confirming Babits's statement that the Hungarian national character is opposed to action.

Of course, it in no way follows that this characterisation is apt for the whole Hungarian people, or that it offers an accurate explanation of Hungarian national history, and even less, an exhaustive one. Yet, the stubborn revivals of it, in ever-renewed period variants, at least demonstrate that, for a century, the leading Hungarian intelligentsia of the time saw itself, the fate of the nation and its own, in this light.

But, how does this opposition of types relate to our more general question: to the a-philosophical, even anti-philosophical character of Hungarian culture? If we apply the scholarly concept of philosophy, then not at all. According to this, great philosophy is the product of enigmatically original talents and geniuses, and the activity of statesmen who, with their actions, determine the national fate, is still more so a matter of individual brilliance. If, however, we consider the true character of philosophy, then a short glance at Hungarian literature from this one standpoint tells us a lot. Because true philosophy is never more than the most abstract expression of how human beings summarise their relation to the world, that is, to nature, society, their own spiritual worlds, and their thoughts.

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6. Zsigmond Moricz, *Transylvania* (1935), comprising *Fairy-Garden* (1922), *The Great Prince* (1934), and *The Shadow of the Sun* (1935). Moricz's historical novel includes the friends, later rival princes, Gábor Báthory, who represents a sort of romantic energy and will, and Gábor Bethlen, who embodies clear-sighted realism and diplomatic cunning.

From this point of view, there is a genuine and serious relation between some of the nation's social aspects and philosophical culture. Of course, in order to understand this, we must be clear that the real problem begins with the establishment of such a type and its characterisation. For, then, we must pose the question: which classes, under what conditions, are represented by these types? How is it that polar-opposite temperaments can originate in the same class, that is, derive from the same social existence?

In this case, naturally, we can no longer conceive of natural character as some unchanging absolute, some originary, untraceable 'substance' that can pass through the historical process superficially altered but without being changed in its essence.

In our country, this latter view still predominates in many respects. If someone looks at how Hungarian historical and literary-historical writing defines the national character of the Hungarian nation, then, in most cases, one can easily recognise the true model, Zsolt Beöthy's Volga horseman.<sup>7</sup> And there are still many to whom it has not yet occurred that the only truly consistent thought-form of such a conception of a superhistorical substance of national character is – race-theory. From Gobineau through Chamberlain to Hitler and Rosenberg, this conception predominates.

Yet, it also did not change the minds of this conception's Hungarian representatives that such historical processes have taken place before them and continue to take place, in which whole nations change their national physiognomies, in consequence of historical turning points putting the guidance of the nation's fate in the hands of new classes, and letting them give shape to the national character. We may recall that the great Russian-revolutionary critic Nikolay Dobrulyubov saw the national type in Oblomov.<sup>8</sup> And, in the period preceding the great Russian Revolution, Maxim Gorky recognised and exposed the Oblomov-type in the most influential writers of his own time, notably in Dostoyevsky. Yet, since 1917, the national character of the Russian people has completely changed. What does the Russian hero of construction-works, or of a war that defends the nation in wartime, have to do with the Oblomov-type's mindset? Of course, for thirty years, the counter-revolutionary emigration cultivated its hopes that the Russian people's mindset, as, for example, Dostoyevsky depicted it, was permanent; and that it is not compatible with

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7. In Beöthy's popular *A Magyar Irodalom Kis-Tükre* ['Little Mirror of Hungarian Literature'], Beöthy 1896, he evokes a solitary 'Volga horseman' who epitomises the Hungarian national character, past and present. See also p. 276, note 18.

8. From the novel *Oblomov* (1859) by Ivan Goncharov (1812–91), which deals with an indecisive, indolent young nobleman who has difficulty even managing to get himself out of bed. The character came to emblematised a certain personality-type akin to Goncharov's satirical character.

Bolshevism, which should thus collapse. Historical reality itself has denied this theory, which was built on air. However, this does not change the fact that the Polish emigration today still hopes that the democratically-reformed Polish people are, after all, the same as in feudal Poland, or that the Hungarians who think 'things should be as they were in the good old days' still always see the Volga horseman as the 'authentic' Hungarian national character.

This assertion, naturally, does not exclude the continuity of national life, nor indeed does it exclude the existence of – relatively – permanent national traits. For continuity is as much a category of objective reality as change, as transformation, as rebirth. The national physiognomy and mindset take shape according to how a people's particular, specifically developing social existence is reacted to by those who give form to this mindset and character, by those who help to render it conscious. The question is always just this: who is reacting, to what, and how?

#### IV

Let us now try to demonstrate the results of this train of thought up to this point, referring to those nations which – in particular periods – had their own philosophical culture. This enumeration will, naturally, be very sketchy, far from even just attempting to exhaust the issue, for the goal of all this is, just through these comparisons, to approach more closely the particularity of Hungarian philosophical culture.

First and foremost, one must emphasise the two classical examples of philosophical culture: the earlier French development and the upsurge of Russian thinkers beginning with the start of the nineteenth century. In both cases, philosophy was the most important intellectual weapon for the elimination of medieval remnants and to prepare for the revolution that would sweep away every trace of feudalism. The power of both philosophical developments and the secret of their effect on national culture was their unsparing research into reality, the sharp conceptual expression of the results obtained, irrespective of the consequences, and the discovery of the laws hidden in them. All this was done with the perspective and intention that the knowledge thus gained and generalised would be carried over into practice, that it would give direction to human actions shaping society, that philosophical enlightenment would become the guide – through the enlightenment of men – to a higher, more rational, happier society, nation, and humanity.

The social basis of both powerful philosophical developments, of a philosophical culture affecting every manifestation of the whole society, was that they condemned, in the name of a new class representing the future –

and with an intensity knowing no forbearance – the whole arrangement of an obsolete society condemned to death, its entire culture. Naturally, these two philosophical developments had different lines, forms, and contents, corresponding to different historical conditions. The French development came into being during the absolute monarchy, in the time in which there was still an equilibrium between the powers of feudal society and the rising bourgeoisie, and it developed up to the intellectual precursors of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Accordingly, at the outset of this development, idealist and materialist tendencies stood in opposition to one another (Descartes and Gassendi), and at its developmental peak, the materialist world-view (Holbach, Helvétius, Diderot) held sway without the great representatives of idealism (Rousseau) being absent. The Russian development, which commenced under more mature social conditions, representing such democratic tendencies that grew into forerunners of socialist revolution; it was, from the outset, materialist, and its materialism grew over into materialist dialectics.

The flowering of German philosophy was, likewise, the period of intellectual preparation for the bourgeois, democratic revolution. The particular characteristic of this development, however, can be summarised as the absence of any living, real, social ground for its truly high-quality conceptual generality and comprehensiveness; in contrast, such social grounding made French and Russian philosophy courageous in its exposure of reality. In this way, the basic tendency of German philosophy was idealist. German philosophy was able to bring about the transition to dialectical thinking on philosophy's most general, abstract terrain, to create a dialectical method of the highest order (Hegel) on an idealist basis; nevertheless, in its reference to reality, it is necessarily murkier, more backward, less resolute than the previously sketched developments. It represents an extraordinarily high quality in its conceptual foundations, but is irresolute, abstract, and obscure in its application to practice. Following from this, first and foremost, is that the philosophy and culture that emerged in this way exerted a deep influence on the peak achievements of ideology (Goethe, Schiller, Heine), without, however, being able to vitally affect the tendencies striving for reform in popular life and popular development. It is not accidental that this intellectual preparation of the German democratic revolution was the preparation of a defeated revolution. Nor is it accidental that the highest-order new philosophy to come into existence in Germany, materialist dialectics, has had its weakest influence on cultural development precisely in the country of its birth. Nor, finally, is it accidental that after the failure of the 1848 Revolution, all the bad aspects of philosophical development manifested themselves to an amplified degree in Germany, and German thought lent intellectual leadership to reactionary thought worldwide.



In its type, the first period of modern English philosophy (Bacon, Hobbes) resembled French developments. Later, however, when the class-compromise between the nobility and the bourgeoisie came into being in the 'Glorious Revolution', in the framework of which the truly major development of English capitalism played itself out, the social function of philosophy radically changed and with this, its whole character. This philosophy now served the goal of making the road free for the growth of capitalist production and ideology, but in such a way that, with the help of 'epistemological' considerations, it excluded in advance from people's thinking any question that might disturb the class-compromise. The hypocrisy that thus arose, which philosophically appeared as agnosticism and scepticism, henceforth determined the general, official path of English philosophical development. (Classical English political economy took over the true idea of progress, the theory of the expansion of productive forces, until, beginning with the middle of the nineteenth century, in this domain as well, tendencies became predominant that left fundamental facts in silence and turned away from the decisive questions.)

## VI

How can we apply the lessons of this development to the history of Hungarian-intellectual culture, or, rather, the absence of this culture? It would seem convenient to call upon the analogy to the English, which is, furthermore, supported by the fact that, for a long time, the imitation of the English model played a decisive role in Hungarian theoretical life. This comparison, however, is flawed because English development was characterised by the fact that English thought became the ideology of class-compromise between the bourgeoisie and the nobility following an essentially victorious bourgeois revolution. In Hungary as well, to a certain degree, class-compromise was an issue. On the one hand, however, it is a class-compromise that came into existence following a defeated revolution, and on the other hand, the bourgeois influence in it was much weaker economically, and, hence, also ideologically. Naturally, in the course of the development of capitalism, the weight of the bourgeois component grew, yet, it never, at any time, would overturn the class-compromise and, within it, the predominance of gentry and gentry ideologies.

The particularity of Hungarian development is a sort of 'cant', in many ways unlike that of the English, a kind of peculiar hypocrisy cultivated on Hungarian-national soil. Its general covenant among 'the powers that be' resides in the view that speaking about the truly decisive questions of the Hungarian nation is not allowed, not possible, not appropriate, or not 'worthy



of a gentleman'. This social pressure is so strong that not a few well-meaning ideologues, who instinctively aim to oppose the consequences, details, or symptoms, nevertheless – again instinctively – shy away from considering and pronouncing on the truly decisive question of Hungarian reality.

What are these questions?

First and foremost, that of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, of exploiter and exploited. In so far as, at the outset of the period of renewal in Hungary, the nobility was the leading stratum in the formation of the nation and national liberation, there could not arise in this issue such a sharp statement of everything, that relentless radicalism as in the intellectual development preparatory to the French Revolution and, even more so, the Russian Revolution. Of course, one cannot set the reform-period and the revolutionary period in parallel with later developments. The sharp-sightedness and outspokenness exhibited by, for example, the novels of József Eötvös find no counterpart in later Hungarian literature. And, especially with Petőfi, we see – as József Révai correctly emphasised – that qualitatively new element that the revolutionary-plebeian stratum signified for Hungarian culture and, above all, could have signified.<sup>9</sup>

This beginning, however, was interrupted with the failure of the liberation-struggle. The way of capitalism, the way of becoming bourgeois, civilisation's path in Hungary was, to avail ourselves of Lenin's expression, the Prussian road: capitalism grew up among the remnants of feudalism without eliminating them, and the further development of ideology corresponded precisely to this social structure. The deeper the internal contradictions in the structure of Hungarian society, the more spellbinding a taboo the question of oppression and exploitation became. It is not by chance that the individual philosophical beginnings present in some measure in Hungarian culture (József Eötvös, János Erdélyi) had roots before 1848. These came to a standstill after the Revolution's failure, and there were no further productive consequences following from these beginnings.

The second great complex of questions about which one could not speak in the old Hungary was the relation of the Hungarian people to the nationalities living in Hungary, to the neighbouring peoples of the Danube River valley. Since the concept of the Hungarian nation became identified with

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9. Lukács appears to have in mind Révai's 15 March 1946 address, 'Petőfi Sándor: A forradalom költője [Sándor Petőfi: Poet of the Revolution]', Révai 1960a, pp. 55–73. However, within the few months prior to Lukács's lecture, Révai had made two other statements concerning Petőfi: 'Petőfi Sándor', Révai 1960a, pp. 74–83; and 'Emlékezés Petőfi Sándorról [Memorial-Speech about Sándor Petőfi]', delivered on 15 March 1948, Révai 1960a, pp. 84–91.

the oppression of the neighbouring peoples, and since the Hungarian nation could only be imagined as the hegemonic power and lord of the Danube River valley, a serious grasp of whatever problem existed in this domain was not to be had.

Finally, the third such question is that of the independence of the Hungarian nation. In the already mentioned, epoch-making essays of Zsigmond Kemény, the complete impossibility of true independence appears as an unquestionable axiom: the 'fatal' attachment of the Hungarian nation to the fate of the Habsburg monarchy. But that which was an axiom for Zsigmond Kemény became a myth after 1867; István Tisza and those around him best embodied this myth. Hungary's forced independence followed World War I. But in so far, however, as the Hungarian ruling class saw as its main task the preservation and imperialist expansion of the old social structure, independence, which was undesired and deeply problematic under such conditions, was soon sold out to Italian and German fascism.

Of course, the objective development and ideological effect of all three questions have numerous phases that fundamentally diverge from one another, which cannot be analysed here. Nevertheless, all of these phases share certain common traits, precisely in consequence of the fact that, about these decisive issues, one was forbidden to speak and – according to the conception of the dominant class – it was harmful to think. In this way, there developed in Hungarian philosophy, not immediately but very quickly, a certain tendency hostile to knowledge and reflection; with his witty cynicism, Mikszáth exposed the social roots of this attitude very precisely. In his novel, *Strange Bedfellows*, he wrote about the difference of the old and new time:

The peasant was still submissive and loved the lords. For his own lord, indeed, he was passionate. He believed that he had given him land, the nourishing mother. Only later he was taught: on the contrary, he nourished the lord with his labour. There are things that one is better off not to learn about.<sup>10</sup>

Without our being able to analyse the whole period, this much must be emphasised: that the leading, gentried and gentroid strata showed, in the course of capitalist development and its growing over into imperialism, ever more strongly decadent traits. The continuously intensifying problematic nature of Hungarian society, the unresolved, but decisive, questions of the nation's existence, questions that were actually insoluble under such

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10. Mikszáth 1960 p. 82.

conditions – this all became objectively ever more tangible. In a subterranean way, they became more and more conscious in the soul of the oppressed people. But to this, as noted above, only an ever-increasing ‘cant’ and hypocrisy and silence was the response, or a kind of blathering that served only to conceal the essential, to hide the real issues. The natural consequence of this situation was that the Hungarian intelligentsia received the influx of Western decadence: every fashionable, Western world-view from Nietzsche and Bergson to fascism found soil in our land. The old, spontaneous hostility to thought dressed itself up in the pseudo-philosophy of modern irrationalism. Hungarian pessimism thus took shape in Dezső Szabó’s writings, the ‘we are alone’ mood, the haunting spectre of national death. And the influence of gentroid culture was so strong that even those who, from a class point of view, do not belong to it, even those who felt themselves critics of the old Hungary – like Dezső Szabó himself – were swept up in the prevailing currents. Thus, when the Hungarian intelligentsia began to consider the fate of Hungary and found it problematic, they were capable of producing only pseudo-philosophy: true recognition of social and historical facts was completely lacking, and this was the basis of those statements that came into existence here. For, as long as the Hungarian nation was instinctively identified with that already existing, and still to be preserved, gentried country, no true thinking or philosophy could emerge. Hungarian culture realised that which the young Karl Marx prophesised about the development of Germany: it will live through the whole negative side of capitalist development without having enjoyed its – once – progressive aspects.

The dominance of gentroid culture is so general that, in basic questions, even oppositional currents conform to it. Naturally, there have always been those who protest against Hungarian gentry-culture, those who have tried to reject the compromise. Yet, all these beginnings were condemned in advance to be hopeless if they did not extend to a radical and concrete revision of the social bases, to a rethinking of the fundamental questions related to them.

This is why the ideology of the Hungarian workers’ movement did not lead to a rejection of the basic compromise. Reformism simply adapted itself into the Hungarian compromise. The internal, left-wing opposition to reformism, in turn, was not capable of carrying out a concrete critique of the basic questions of national existence. It contraposed abstract principles to the rotten Hungarian reality, leading to pseudo-radicalism, precisely because it was unable to radically overcome revisionism.

For completely different reasons, which nevertheless have their social basis in the same Hungarian reality, the populist ideology expressing the mobilisation of the Hungarian reality, of the peasantry, was also unable to sweep

away the rotten compromises of the Hungarian ruling class's world-view. They were unable to break radically with gentroid culture, and, thus, Western decadence, the irrationalist pseudo-philosophical thinking of the imperialist period, flowed into their thinking, thus they continued with 'tragic' accents the lineage of a century of Hungarian-cultural development.

## VI

Thus: before the MKP, no one had concretely and resolutely eliminated this ideological tangle of falsehoods that arose on the social basis of Hungarian-intellectual development, which wove even Hungary's greatest talent into its web of errors, self-deceptions, conceits, and hypocrisies. (In this context, there is no space to discuss how the MKP developed to the point that it could take over this role of leadership. Already, from the outset, it possessed a dedicated will to eliminate this ideological web; initially, of course, this dedication still had, to some extent, certain abstract aspects. But, in such a passing reference, one must point out one mistaken conception: the notion that, in 1945, the Hungarian Communists stepped up with a completely new world-view or tactics compared to their first emergence. That which we have brought before the broad masses of the Hungarian people after the liberation was already, for a decade, the common currency of the Communist world-view – as can easily be demonstrated by the writings of leading Communists, Communist newspapers, pamphlets, and so on.)

The structure of Hungarian society we have sketched out and the main tendency of Hungarian ideological development that derived from this structure are among the main motifs of the important, literary, historical fact that, in Hungarian literature – one might say: in contrast to all other literature – the lyric plays the leading role, that the world-literary significance of Hungarian epic and drama are dwarfed by that of the lyric. (All this is true to an even greater degree for the development of music.) In lyric poetry, truth and reality are represented most powerfully and completely; it expresses all the great impulses, desires, and demands of the Hungarian people striving for liberation. But, naturally – according to its generic essence – these appear in the form of subjective desires and demands; the greatest lyric poets shine through the web of compromises, lies, and conceits with dazzling facts, of course without being able to penetrate it with such poetic means, or depicting in poetic form the objective reality, its motive forces and laws of movement. However – within the boundaries of the genre, and this limitation of poetry also arose from social reality – here the truest, most passionate protest against the false, distorted developmental line, structure, and atmosphere of Hungarian reality comes into existence.

The other domains of literature cannot achieve such eminence. Immediately prior to the 1848 Revolution, there was an equal start in the direction of such a significant Hungarian epic with Petőfi's and Arany's completely unique popular epics, which were without analogue in world-literature. This development, which showed extraordinary prospects, was, however, interrupted by the defeat of the liberation-struggle. After 1848, neither in epic nor in drama did there come into being such works that could even approach this level of quality.

There is nothing in this judgement that is denigrating. Nor is it a matter of a purely aesthetic evaluation. Everyone knows the significance of the narrative works of József Eötvös, Zsigmond Kemény and Mór Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth and Zsigmond Móricz. (Although Eötvös's novels, just like József Katona's drama *Bánk Bán*,<sup>11</sup> are products of developments before 1848.) What is missing after 1848 from the epic or drama derives precisely from the mutual interplay of the essential qualities of the genres depicting the social situation, the world-view, and the large totality of society – that is to say, from the particularity of Hungarian development.

Nothing particularly new is being asserted here. Thoughtful Hungarian authors have always sensed this lack. Kálmán Mikszáth, even, clearly sees that the root of the problem lies with the growing distance between public life and literature:

Twenty-odd years passed, and literature and politics have nothing in common anymore. They parted from the table and from the bed. The bed went to literature; tossing and turning in it, it is able neither to fall asleep nor be awake; the prepared table went to politics, which did its utmost to overturn it. But they did not only separate, they began to scorn one another in turn.<sup>12</sup>

This statement is of great significance, not only because we really cannot see Mikszáth as a person inclined and engaged in revolutionary ways, but also because he views the problem to lie precisely in this break with politics, because, precisely, he, who among the writers of the period wrote most about daily political life, sees here the problematic nature of Hungarian literature. Thus, in this statement is implied – although not explicitly expressed, perhaps not even fully thought through – that the nature of Hungarian politics is responsible for the unhealthy separation of literature and public life. Because the politics that Mikszáth, as a superb, witty chronicler, depicted practically day by day, was in essence not suited to creating a productive reciprocity

11. *Bánk Bán*, Katona 1983, narrates an episode in medieval Hungarian history.

12. Mikszáth 1964, pp. 1670–3, 1671, *Cikkek és Karcolatok* ['Articles and Sketches'] III.

between public life and culture, to raising to a higher level Hungarian literature's quality of thought and world-view.

To summarise in brief: it followed from this situation, and first and foremost in reference to the larger literary genres, that they were incapable of extensively grasping the whole, the totality, of Hungarian social life. Ferenc Erdei, writing about Zsigmond Móricz, quite interestingly emphasised a number of times that the life-work of this excellent writer 'almost' encompassed in itself the whole of Hungarian society. This 'almost' is extraordinarily indicative of the situation that we have sought to present in its causes.

But, in intensive terms, too, a complete, uncompromising, and thoroughly considered exploration of the fundamental questions of Hungarian social existence is lacking. This lack is responsible for the fact that, since 1848, one can no longer speak of Hungarian drama. But, so, too, for the large epic forms, the border is there, against which literature collides. If public life and, along with it, literature evades an unsparing examination of the national existence, then in the last instance, it is not of decisive importance whether this evasion has romantic or humoristic traits, whether 'heroic pessimism' or Hungarian 'Realpolitik' constitutes its ideological basis. The essence is, in each case, the same: Hungarian social existence does not allow a clear posing and consistent answering of its own fundamental questions.

If, at this point, the Hungarian writer cannot even seriously ask 'What is the Hungarian people? What is its national destiny?', then the suffocation of the writer's responsibility and distortion of the writer's physiognomy necessarily follows. Again, we quote Kálmán Mikszáth as our witness. In one of the introductions that he wrote for the almanac of Hungarian writers, he shares the opinion of a man who observes his work with sober attention and sharp criticism. From the text, it clearly emerges who this critic is: Kálmán Mikszáth himself. With regard his own activity, he wrote, here:

Ah, you did not do this well, my dear, because if a pruning knife was placed in your blessed hand, then it was given to you to prune the great trees in the meadow with it, and not, instead, to crouch on the ground to the running vines and carve out with its point fantastic arabesques in the pumpkins.<sup>13</sup>

What Kálmán Mikszáth asserts about himself with bitter self-mockery, in a substantial portion of later Hungarian literature appeared as arrogant cynicism, as self-satisfied aestheticism. Only rarely did despair about this situation receive serious and moving expression, as in the later Mihály Babits.

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13. Mikszáth 1901.

Here, the liberation of 1945 signifies change and a turning point. In particular, precisely thanks to the MKP. Those whom it has accompanied since 1945 – even if they were not secret opponents of radical change – lacked a truly clear view of the problem and a dedicated will to radical solutions.

This is not the place to speak about the political, economic, and social changes; we would only like to highlight that these, without exception, referred to basic questions of national existence that had already been enumerated, yet, until now, never resolved. The MKP addressed these, in particular so that every measure would create both the material and the intellectual preconditions of the new cultural turning point. That Hungary, whose social structure determined the culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has either reached its end or is in the process of passing away. In this way, for the first time in Hungarian history, the question of the oppression and exploitation of the working people has been taken up with theoretical sharpness and – in large part – solved in practice. Likewise, other fundamental questions: the international destiny of the Hungarian people, its relation to the neighbouring peoples, its connection to the community of progressive peoples, and the true independence of the Hungarian nation. The MKP has, thus, sharply posed, thought through consistently, and in accordance with the possibilities, solved in practice, the decisive problems of national existence that have been, until now, insoluble. The great questions of principle regarding Hungarian-national existence now play a role as the guiding principles of social practice, that is, they determine the direction of the concrete activities of present-day social life.

This new, social existence dissolves the false dichotomy of the old conception of Hungarianness; the divisive opposition of principle and action. The principle, which in the past had a mainly legal character (the legal continuity of the historical Hungary), in essence constituted a formal-logical evasion of the decisive questions of national existence. To an equal extent, the question of the principle-denying, Hungarian 'Realpolitik' stands condemned. History clearly shows that, in its objective essence, it was nothing other than the conscious or unconscious precursor of national catastrophe. For today's life, the famous Werbőczy-Martinuzzi duality loses any validity; it remains of value solely as a lesson in past Hungarian history. But, likewise, the relation of life as it is lived to daydreamers, to the Hungarian Oblomov, changes; from Balász Hűbele<sup>14</sup> to Gyula Krúdy's heroes, this type has, likewise, lost its present-day social validity. The people's dreams, in turn, are changing into concrete, active

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14. The hero of János Arany's poem, *The Hero of Mirages*. Like Oblomov, Balász Hűbele describes a character-type that goes beyond fiction: one whose enthusiasm peters out and leads only to failure; he is also specifically set in the period following



reality to an increasing degree. Of course, even in such a short survey, we must still point out that Petőfi related in a totally different way to the Hungarian Oblo-mov-quality than most Hungarian writers; this elimination of a type that is now emerging, thus, does not go further in its relentlessness and pitilessness than that characterisation that Petőfi gave to Pál Pató and his soulmates.<sup>15</sup> (Perhaps it does not need to be separately mentioned that this elimination does not mean, on the one hand, that such depictions of types should lose their poetic credibility in reference to the past. On the other hand, still less does it mean that, from one day to the next, this turn could be achieved among the Hungarian people as a whole. It can only be a matter of this turn having begun, and it will increasingly permeate the world-view of the Hungarian working people.)

## VII

Here the significance of Marxism and Leninism in Hungarian culture emerges. Western peoples created their own world-views in their period of revolutionary flourishing. Yet, because of the particularity of bourgeois development, these either fell into almost complete oblivion, as in England since the 'Glorious Revolution',<sup>16</sup> or were never a concrete, active factor affecting society, as in Germany with the revolutionary method of Hegel's dialectic.

The Russian development, from the ideological viewpoint, is thus exemplary – both on the social terrain and in its construction of people's democracy and socialism. One of the manifestations of Lenin's genius is that he put Marxism in living relation with the most progressive tendencies of Russian ideological development, with its philosophical development from Belinsky to Chernyshevsky. With the help of this context, Marxism in Russia became an integral, creative part of national culture, and especially in consequence of the further development that Lenin carried out, it became the basis of the cultural upsurge of all peoples of the Soviet Union.

In order to understand the true significance of this development, we have to consider that Marx himself, despite his continuation of the most progressive tendencies of German literature and philosophy, never became a philosophical force actively and concretely influencing the culture of his homeland.

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the failure of the Hungarian independence-struggle, so his various dreams of social reform and other 'mirages' have a satirical topicality in Arany's historical context.

15. Lukács refers to Sándor Petőfi's 1847 poem, 'Pató Pál Úr [Mr. Paul Pató]', whose refrain (literally) is: 'Aw, plenty of time for that!'

16. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which William of Orange invaded England and overthrew James II; it instituted a Bill of Rights, limited the power of the King, and established a modern parliamentary order.



And in our day, we see what efforts the English, French, Italian, and so on. Marxists must make in order to make Marxism-Leninism – in connection with the truly progressive, ideological tendencies in their own country – the philosophical and social-philosophical basis of a new culture and a concretely and actively determinate factor in that culture.

This situation determines the tasks in today's Hungary on the terrain of world-view and social outlook. We have already stressed the necessity of a radical break with the past, a resolute drawing of the ideological consequences of political and economic developments. However, every break also signifies the creation of a new continuity: the re-evaluation of the past, its exploration anew. The two tasks are consequently inseparable from one another: a sharp accent on what must be broken with in the past, while, at the same time, recognising all those works and tendencies – often fragmentary – that were objectively directed towards the present renewal of the Hungarian people. The great lesson of the history of ideas is that times of great renewal do not just reveal distant, dawning prospects in the future, but also reveal the past to us in a new light, with greater objectivity. Thus, the revolutionary period in which modern-bourgeois society came into being also produced a recognition and understanding of the true character of antiquity, which did not exist as an independent cultural factor during the feudal period, as long as the perspective of new development had not come to light. Likewise, the recognition and concretisation of the socialist perspective connects with the recognition and understanding of the beginning phase of humanity, of primitive communism. The more clear, sharp, and fundamental the break with the past, and the more fundamental the form in which the perspective of the future appears, the more we will find in the past what is new and valuable.

In such periods of transition, the social role of philosophy appears with particular decisiveness. At such times, it becomes clear how true philosophy has nothing in common with those caricatures insulated from society that both academic lecture-hall philosophy and subjectivistic philosophical essayism represent. Yet, until now, philosophy has only appeared before Hungarian public opinion in these distorted forms. The essence of philosophy is generalisation, but generalisation pertaining to the deepest inter-relatedness and lawfulness of reality; that sort of universality which, one might say, constitutes the tip of a pyramid. The base of the pyramid, however, is the new comportment of the working people towards the new reality: work, struggle, orienting in a new world such as workers themselves build for themselves, which they themselves clear of the debris piled up by the past.

The consequence of this, first and foremost, is that philosophy ceases to have an insular existence in society. Even if, at present, this relation between

one's own comportment and philosophy is not recognised, this comportment – objectively – progresses in a philosophical direction, and thus, without doubt, it will, sooner or later, also become conscious. The worker who recognises that rather than an unrestrained rise in wages, the social organisation of production is the way to his own advancement; who rejects the Károly Peyer-type of social-democratic demagoguery (first bread, then work) and such like; the peasant who shakes off the different forms of reactionary demagoguery and sees that without the alliance of workers and peasants there can be no prosperity for him; who seeks the path of co-operative association: each of these progresses towards where true, productive, concrete universality once again becomes possible, where the foundations – not just material, but also intellectual – of the new Hungarian culture may be laid, where the Marxist-Leninist world-view can organically connect to Hungarian culture.

Thus, the MKP, by putting Hungarian economic and political life on true foundations, by destroying the web of lies, conceits, and hypocrisies of the old Hungarian society, created in consequence the possibility of a new Hungarian-spiritual culture based on the correct recognition of reality and on thinking through to the truth with unswerving consistency. Marxism-Leninism is, at once, an intellectual foundation and a scientific as well as a practical method for transforming these possibilities into reality.

On this terrain, there is a great tendency in the old Hungarian intelligentsia to resist, indeed, the tendency exists even in the petty-bourgeois and peasant-strata under its influence. This intelligentsia, even if not always expressly, but essentially, asserts that the irrational is 'deeper' and 'more beautiful' than the simple, that reality understood as chaotic is more attractive than the 'prosaic' order of society, that it is better and more elevated to dream than to act, that optimism is 'flatter', less distinguished, than pessimism. In short, if the development of society (and with it, of ideology, poetry, art, and philosophy) progresses beyond the social and moral deformation that capitalism and, above all, imperialism causes, and which in our country, was even intensified by its growing up amidst the vestiges of feudalism – then life will cease to be interesting and human individuality will be lost.

This resistance does not imply the emergence of any new issues. Already, Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto*, mocked the bourgeoisie's complaint about the trampling and crippling of individuality – if he loses the possibility of exploiting others; and exploitation is, indeed, an integral element of the bourgeois individual. So, too, in our country, the defenders of the remnants of the past reason in the same fashion. This point of view is nothing new. The reactionary grandfather of today's existentialists, Søren Kierkegaard, already a hundred years ago, repeated, with this variation, the basic precept of English

liberalism, 'My home is my castle': 'My loneliness is my castle'. The defenders of imperialist decadence, accordingly, consider this distorting ideological 'fortress', which the social system has erected for them, to be integral to their individuality, just as exploitation appears essential to the bourgeoisie's self-conception.

For those of these defenders who wish to consider some state of affairs in a good-willed and unprejudiced way, it would not hurt to think seriously about the following issue: the basic fact of any serious philosophical activity is to surpass in thought the immediately given, external and internal reality. And, here, it is worth taking into consideration the fact that, while these defenders of imperialist decadence – relying on irrationalist pseudo-philosophy – get themselves mired in their immediately given, subjective being, which is itself produced for them by imperialism, those workers and peasants of whom we were previously speaking have progressed with their practical conduct beyond the immediately given data of their existence. We should, therefore, have no fears for the quality of intellectual culture. Precisely in a philosophical sense, these workers and peasants, even if they are not aware of it, stand on higher philosophical ground in terms of intellectual self-conduct, the relation between life and thought, than the adherents of existentialism, surrealism, and so on.

Such resistance as such is not a uniquely Hungarian problem. Thomas Mann characterised today's struggle of world-views as battles of life against death, health against sickness and disintegration. But, in our country, this question is given a particular accent by the philosophy and poetics of national extinction, which derives from that justified feeling that the life of the old Hungary was subsisting at the edge of an abyss, and, at any minute, could plunge into it. The problematic nature of the old, aristocratic Hungary was expressed by the movingly prophetic voice of Vörösmarty a century earlier; now, however, after the flood of European decadence, it brings forth nothing more than a conceited flirtation with death. In this respect, one of the most important parts of reckoning with the past is confrontation with the immediate, recent past, because, in our country, decadence was deeply mixed together with the reactionary world-view of gentroid Hungary, and, today, it exercises a still-not-to-be-underestimated influence even upon such people whose cultural activity could in no way be indifferent for us.

It is, thus, necessary that the turn that occurred in social life be followed by a turn in feeling, thoughts, and world-view. The philosophical basis of Hungarian pessimism – often unconsciously – was precisely that the true nature of the social structure was taboo; those who live today could learn a lot from Mikszáth in clear-sightedness and self-criticism. It is, thus, not by chance that

in our country, the protest against seeking out and exposing the bases of society, the emphasis on these social bases, has been so violent. It is not by chance that opposition to the people's democracy, a shrinking back before the difficulties of construction, hides beneath the superhistorical contemplation of 'tragic' Hungarianness. It is not by chance that those who resist and recoil seek to justify themselves by means of a world-view asserting that reality is, in principle, chaotic and unknowable, emphasising the impotence of reason, the incoherence and irrationality of reality. The ideological remnants of a sick society want to remain sick, glorifying sickness against health.

Marxism-Leninism is the world-view of health, because it shows the way to humanity's conduct and recovery. One of the fundamental precepts of its social philosophy is that, just as the human being creates himself as a human being through his labour, so too, in the course of the social process, classes, nations, even humanity itself, produce themselves through their social activity, through their ever more conscious self-activity. (That this activity always derives from the given economic development of society not only establishes its limits, it also signifies the true concretisation of the goals and possibilities of action.) Just as the politics of the MKP created a homeland for the working people, so, too, a Marxism-Leninism translated into action prepares the world in which, some day, all humanity will be at home. 1848 and the cultural developments that preceded it – within the boundaries established by the period and its social structure – strove in this direction. The demand for these goals brought into existence the poetics of Petőfi's *János Vitéz* and Arany's *Toldi*,<sup>17</sup> and in their name Eötvös and Vörösmarty launched accusations and rendered judgements.

The historical calling of the MKP was reckoning with a century of rotten compromise and betrayal of the nation and people. After three years of democratic transformation, we are politically and economically on the best road towards rebirth. Once again, we have approached the most developed nations of the world. Our cultural renewal is the fulfilment on a high plane of that which the best of 1848 were striving to achieve, and for which the most distinguished Hungarians since then have waged a lonely struggle; this cultural fulfilment is 'only' the fulfilment of those Hungarian desires, 'only' the resolute drawing of conclusions from the new reality already being constructed today. This 'only', of course, implies a radical turn, a reckoning and break with the past. The representatives of this break are, collectively, the MKP: precisely its consistency, unyieldingness, and theoretical clarity create

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17. *János Vitéz* ['Sir John'], 1845, a long, fantastical verse-narrative by Sándor Petőfi (1823–49); *Toldi* (1847), the first of a trilogy of verse-narrative poems centred on the medieval hero Miklós Toldi, by János Arany (1817–82).

that intellectual and moral atmosphere in which the past can be broken with and the construction of the future can follow. But the best Hungarians of the past, even of the recent past, also felt that this was the key issue. Miklós Radnóti concludes his poem written on the occasion of the death of the painter, Huber Dési, with these words:

Live out the bad world  
and always know, what you must do for it,  
to make it different.<sup>18</sup>

That which Radnóti, for the first time, states concretely and consistently, the MKP also – for the first time – concretely and consistently realises. This creates a turning point, the possibility of a new period in Hungarian life and culture. Because only if the real life of the working people takes shape in such a way that the recognition and reform of the reality developing in it can organically grow up to the highest pinnacle of culture, only then is a true cultural rebirth possible. We said it before: it is one of the fundamental precepts of the doctrine of dialectical materialism that man, the nation, humanity produce themselves through their own labour and their own struggle. This must, however, originate from below, from out of the working people. The Hungarian culture of the past century was erected precisely on the denial of this truth. This truth had already been perfectly expressed in Petőfi's poem, 'Föltámadott a Tenger [The Sea is Rising]'

Unleash, you flood waters,  
Unleash yourself,  
Show your profound bed,  
And throw up to the clouds  
Your raging foam;

Bear with it to the skies  
Eternal witness:  
Even if the warship is above  
And below streams the tide,  
The waters thus are lord!<sup>19</sup>

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18. Lukács quotes from Miklós Radnóti's memorial-poem for the painter Huber István Dési, 'Nem bírta hát...', dated 29 February 1944. Cf. Radnóti 1976, p. 223.

19. Petőfi 1960, p. 405. Petőfi's poem is dated from the end of March 1848, thus just after the outbreak of the Revolution on 15 March.

The MKP's role in this historical turn is that it secures a resolute direction for the popular mobilisation from below, goals that originate in essential reality, so that this mobilisation should not remain on the level of a mere spontaneous impulse. The significance of Marxism-Leninism in this process is that only with its help can the people's spontaneous movement become conscious; only with its help can those who are today still hesitating and wavering become actors. This theory alone is capable of giving direction to the people's movement, making conscious what is correct in it and separating from it what is harmful to the collective; only it is capable of raising the consciousness of these popular movements to an ever higher level. The theory of Marxism-Leninism and the activity of the MKP truly guide the development of the people. Not only do these make conscious what the working people want and desire; they also, starting from the objective economic situation of the working people, point out paths which, followed to conclusion, become the essential constituents of new knowledge. The structure of the whole of Hungarian society is changing radically, and this change will produce a radically new Hungarian culture, though a new culture built on the most progressive traditions of the past. Its initiator and leader is the MKP.

1948

## Chapter Fifteen

### **The Revision of Hungarian Literary History<sup>1</sup>**

#### **A Lecture on the Occasion of the Reassembly of the Hungarian Literary-Historical Society<sup>2</sup>**

The reconstitution of the Hungarian Literary-Historical Society does not signify a mere change of direction. The work of this Society is only justifiable if it makes its centrepiece a complete and radical revision of Hungarian literary history. This way of posing the issue raises the society's activity above that of literary-historical expertise narrowly conceived. Everyone who believes seriously in the democratic renewal of Hungarian society vividly feels the necessity of this revision. Everyone knows – equally from a political, social, literary, and pedagogical point of view – that this revision is essential for further progress, and that we have still fallen far short of what is genuinely necessary for the progress of democracy.

On the other hand, all the adherents of reaction, who now have been increasingly pushed out of the public arena of political and social life, are attempting to consolidate the opponents of democracy on the terrain of ideology, protesting openly or covertly

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1. Originally published in *Forum*, 3, 11 (1948): 860–77.

2. Lukács served as President of the society from 1949–53. It was originally founded in 1911. From 1912, it published the journal, *Irodalomtörténet* ['Literary History'], which ceased publication at the end of 1947 and was restarted in 1949. Lukács's address, held on 16 October 1948, is hence connected with this redirection of the publication in the context of the 'cultural revolution' set in motion during the Rákosi dictatorship.

against such strivings. They reproach us with having unjustifiably politicised Hungarian literature and literary history, so that aesthetic considerations of it are pushed to the background, or even falsified. Such resistance, even if very widespread, has not yet crystallised into a determinate ideology with which one might polemicise on the level of principles. On the one hand, this tendency seeks to preserve the honour of 'traditions' (later, we will speak in detail about these traditions), while, on the other hand, it strives to erase the basic fact and principle value of Hungarian literature, that the best and greatest Hungarian literature has *always* been political literature. In this can be found the best traditions of Hungarian literary history. It suffices to consider Petőfi and Arany, Ady and Zsigmond Móricz, or Attila József. The counter-revolutionary period falsified this tradition not only by 'scholarly' means, but also with distorted editions of our great poets. The first task of the revision of literary history is, thus, the correction and elimination of these distortions.

But, our task goes far beyond the reparation of offences and mistakes. At stake is an up-to-date, scholarly, critical comprehension of the whole course of literary history. Here, however, one should not exclude from view that we are not posing the question of the revision of literary history for the first time; this demand for revision is, in itself, far from a special characteristic of the present day. On the contrary. Whoever is a little familiar with Hungarian literary history must know that, at every greater or lesser turn in the development of Hungarian society, the problem of revising the previous literary development was posed. This occurred already in the time of József Bajza's and Ferenc Toldy's appearance; the critical significance of Pál Gyulai was that he carried through such a radical re-evaluation after the failure of the 1848 Revolution and especially after the 1867 Compromise; before World War I, *Nyugat* ['The West'] signified a revision of this sort, as did the emergence of populist literature between the two world wars, and so on. Even this most glancing, bird's-eye view of the history of Hungarian literary history shows that its development consists of a series of more or less radical revisions. Every such revision had not only a value-destroying, negative aspect, but also signified discoveries, the introduction of new, unrecognised or misunderstood values into the essential course of Hungarian literary history. It suffices to allude to how János Vajda and Lajos Tolnai came ever more to the fore between the two world wars; the Kálmán Mikszáth debates of recent years, likewise show how the necessity of such re-evaluations comes spontaneously to present itself.<sup>3</sup>

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3. In referring to these authors, Lukács is pointing to the ways in which the changing horizon of the present leads to re-interpretation – including 'discovery' – of previously unexamined figures and motifs from the past.



This is not by chance, but, rather, follows from the essence of all historical knowledge: the past is not some static, closed, motionless 'thing', but, instead, is an objective process that leads into the present and through it into the future. Every tremor of the present and new revelation of future perspectives (correct or not) always illuminate past tendencies whose true significance could not be recognised and properly evaluated by their contemporaries because they could not see the path of social-historical development.

All these viewpoints emerge in the earlier revisions as well – yet among these, emerging only spontaneously, and thus, often arbitrarily, almost always unmethodically and without a clear stance (consider the critical activity of *Nyugat* and populist literature). This spontaneity originates from the fact that, in the Hungarian literary process to date, the majority of writers and critics have, at best, only instinctively intuited the true social significance of present transformations, and hence, only instinctively related to the past as well, in their re-evaluation of it. Aesthetically, this instinctiveness achieved typical expression in the false dilemma between pure content and abstract form.

If we are speaking about former revisions of Hungarian literary history, then we must lay particular emphasis on the importance and decades-long effects of its reactionary revisions. Among these, the most important are the '*Geisteswissenschaften*'<sup>4</sup> of Hungarian academicism following the 1867 Compromise and during the counter-revolutionary period. The pitiless criticism of such reactionary tendencies must be a central function of our organisation. Here, I can only very briefly call attention to a few points. First and foremost, we must examine that social-historical conception which was the conscious or unconscious basis of the whole valuation of literature in Hungarian '*Geisteswissenschaften*'. Gyula Szekfű's conception of history was its deepest influence. From this conception, we will single out only two key motives, which, naturally, are connected in the closest possible fashion. One is that Hungary is connected 'by destiny' to the Habsburg Monarchy. (The *Geisteswissenschaften*, here, merely warmed over and updated the counter-revolutionary pamphlets written by Zsigmond Kemény after the failure of 1848.)<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, fixes in

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4. Lukács uses the Hungarian term '*szellemtudomány*', always in quotation marks, to indicate the completely derivative nature of this Hungarian school of thought, which borrowed its methodology and name directly from the German *Geisteswissenschaften*. Lukács saw this intellectual tendency, spanning from Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) to Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), as a dangerous symptom of the decay of bourgeois-philosophical thought into an irrationalistic ideology, serving to obfuscate or, even, justify the increasing irrationalism of late-bourgeois society. See: Lukács 1980a.

5. After the defeat of the 1848–9 independence-struggle, of which he had been an advocate, Kemény recanted his previous views in two pamphlets, *Forradalom után* ['After the Revolution'] and *Még egy szó a forradalom után* ['One Word More after the

place a negative, conservative, or outright counter-revolutionary evaluation of all Hungarian liberation-movements. The second key point is the necessary connection of the fate of the Hungarian nation to the Hungary of large landowner, capitalist, and gentry. The decline of this society was accordingly asserted by the *Geisteswissenschaften* to be a national decline.

Clearly, this interpretation of history stands in close relation to that political mainstream of the counter-revolutionary period, which finally led Hungary into the ultimate labyrinth of alliance with Nazi Germany. This relation exists on the terrain of ideology and, thus, demands sharp criticism from us, even if certain major representatives of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, such as, for example Gyula Szekfű himself, drew back from the ultimate political consequences of this line and rejected the alliance with Hitler.<sup>6</sup> Such political turns or reservations never brought about the revision of the method of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Furthermore, this method was not merely a German import, but was also, precisely, the leading pseudo-scholarly method of German imperialism, a method essentially compelling those who utilised it to engage in reactionary falsifications.

The method of the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' developed on the terrain of German imperialist reaction out of the need to justify German imperialism's anti-progressive and anti-popular goals through a synthesis of epistemology and philosophy of history. For the imperialist period, the anti-progressive and anti-revolutionary disposition of positivism based on 'facts' no longer sufficed; it was necessary to conceive and propagate positive, reactionary ideals. The method of the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' served these reactionary needs of the imperialist period.

Here, we can touch only briefly upon the most important methodological issue. This is the fetishising of particular currents and tendencies in intellectual life. For Szekfű, for example, the baroque is not the stylistic product of some economically and historically determinate social structure, but, rather, some sort of fetishised 'spiritual' power that determined, with the necessity of fate, the forms in which every man of the period thought, acted, and felt. Thus, if the relationship of the Hungarian landlord and peasant in this period

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Revolution']. He became an important political voice in preparing the 1867 Compromise with Austria that led to the creation of the Dual Monarchy.

6. Despite his strong ideological ties to the counter-revolutionary governments of interwar Hungary, Szekfű was also anti-German. After World War II, he served as a Hungarian special diplomat and ambassador to the USSR and continued in various roles under the Communist government of the early 1950s. In a 1947 book with a title echoing that of Kemény's a century earlier – Szekfű 1983 – he re-examined his previous conservative views and argued that Hungary had by-passed Western democratic forms and needed to adopt Soviet-style 'democracy'.

is under discussion, then the decisive motif is not political oppression and economic exploitation, but rather 'baroque spirituality'. It changes nothing in this fetishism if a given historian or literary historian puffs up not periods, but 'types' or 'characteristics' into eternally valid 'spiritual' powers. (See, for example, Lajos Prohászka's book, *The Wanderer and Exile*,<sup>7</sup> in which this fetishising of character spills over into demonstrating the community of destiny between the German and Hungarian nations.) Subsequently, this method leads to Hungarian literary history's repletion with pseudo-periodisations (Antal Szerb: 'preromantic'; Zolnai: 'Biedermeier').<sup>8</sup>

This whole tendency is extraordinarily dangerous for the development of our literary history. Already, the German *Geisteswissenschaften* strove – beginning with Dilthey and Simmel – to build certain social references, misinterpreted with the help of the fetishisation sketched above, into a science of history. The influence of this was deeply felt in our country because these pseudo-social viewpoints worked their way into progressive-literary outlooks as well, even into research calling itself Marxist; of course, in these cases, it was a matter of a shotgun-wedding with an equally fetishistic, vulgar sociology.

This danger in our literary history is increased by the pseudo-contemporariness and pseudo-modernity propagated with the assistance of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. In the literary outlook of the counter-revolutionary period, an important new motif was the praise of decadence. The issue was construed as if genuine artistic progress ('progress' here signifies bourgeois decadence) and political and social reaction – the preservation of the gentrified Hungary – were necessarily related. This came to light even more clearly in the oppositional-literary outlook of the period than in the official tendencies. Urbanist and populist partook equally in this error; the literary interpretations of Antal Szerb and László Németh<sup>9</sup> often closely converged in this regard.

If, now, we pose the question of criticism, it is clear that this is impossible without disclosing the true bases and development of society. Thus, the revision that has presently become so urgent is the necessary consequence of a conscious and consciously progressive transformation of society. This accounts for the clarity of the general method necessitated by this revision

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7. Prohászka 1936, an influential work in the idealist-cultural historiography to which Lukács was strongly opposed, contrasted the national character-types of the German (as wanderer) and the Hungarian (as exile). Interestingly, although the general political orientation of the *Geisteswissenschaft* school was right-leaning and nationalist, the opposition of the Hungarian to the German allowed this tendency to embrace anti-Nazi positions.

8. Lukács here refers to Zolnai 1940.

9. Németh put forward a national characterology distinguishing between 'deep Hungarians' and 'shallow Hungarians', which had racist and anti-Semitic overtones.

and exemplary of it: its self-evident aspect, so to speak. At the same time, however, it also accounts for the great difficulty of carrying out this method in practice.

Let us return to our earlier discussion, where we indicated the relation of past and present. This viewpoint played a role in the revisionary movements of previous periods as well. However, contrary to earlier tendencies, we have to make clear that the methodological relation of the present conjuncture to our understanding of the past does not imply any arbitrary subjectivism, although, in the bourgeois past, this was always the case. Such subjectivism was most visible in the criticism of the *Nyugat* period; Ignóty and Lajos Hatvany made a self-conscious method of this arbitrary, allegedly sovereign subjectivism. The contemporaneous theory of history also sought to support this subjectivism epistemologically, whether to some extent covertly (Heinrich Rickert) or completely explicitly (Benedetto Croce); the then fashionable Western criticism and essayism went even further down this path.

What is the truth of the matter? Marx quite clearly formulated this relation: 'The key to the anatomy of the ape is human anatomy. The reference in the lower species to aspects of the higher only becomes comprehensible when the higher is already known. Bourgeois economy only leads to the understanding of feudal, ancient, or Eastern societies when the self-criticism of bourgeois society has been initiated'.<sup>10</sup>

In reference to intellectual history, Marx illuminated this relation with the example of the notable German economic historian Maurer: 'The first reaction to the French Revolution and the Enlightenment bound up with it, was, naturally, to regard everything as medieval, romantic, and even people like Grimm are not free from this. The second reaction to it is to look beyond the Middle-Ages into the primitive age of every people – and this corresponds to the socialist tendency, though these learned men have no idea that they are connected with it. And they are, then, surprised to find what is newest in what is oldest...'.<sup>11</sup> This pertains to Bachofen and Morgan as well.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, if we want to subject Hungarian literary history to a conscious and serious revision, then our basic viewpoint can only be that our literature reflects the Hungarian people's struggles for freedom, independence, and happiness.

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10. Lukács is quoting from Karl Marx's 1857 *Grundrisse*; I have translated from Lukács's Hungarian version, which varies somewhat from the standard-English translation.

11. Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 25 March 1868.

12. Both Bachofen and Morgan were crucial influences on Engels's theory of primitive communism and his ideas of the evolution of social institutions in *The Origins of Private Property, the Family, and the State* (1884).

With this postulate, the basic principles of the method are clearer than ever before; the concrete tasks, however, are more difficult and complicated.

Because the problems of revision – in the final instance – are insoluble without a revision of the whole of Hungarian history, if we understand this revision in the broadest sense, it would, thus, encompass a re-evaluation of social and economic history and entail new research into them. Posing the problem in this way implies no sort of resignation or passive waiting, as if those occupied with literary history should wait with folded hands until the historians carry out a revision of Hungarian history. Quite on the contrary. It is, rather, a matter of our literary researchers reorienting their scholarly methods: literary history itself should concern itself with social, economic, and political history. Our literary historians should not wait for others to search out the economic and social facts related to their problems, but, rather, should themselves carry out independent research that establishes and supplements the literary relations. This re-orientation, moreover, means that they must work closely with those who are carrying out the revision of Hungarian historical writing. The isolation of literary history from the other branches of Hungarian-historical writing must cease. This implies conscious and organised collective work.

Second, we must emphasise that the problems of literary-historical revision are – in the final instance – insoluble without incessantly viewing them from an international perspective. Here, we confront the same difficulties and struggle to overcome them using the same methods, with the – methodologically not decisive – difference that, here, we have to also rely continuously on what foreign Marxist scholars have produced, especially scholars from the Soviet Union but also from England, France, and so on.

Naturally, we are speaking of a new sort of research inseparable from the elimination of the old type of history. We must bring to an end the old style of comparing Hungarian and foreign literature, whether this was done in a chauvinistic or defeatist spirit. We must get rid of the old method of so-called comparative-literary history and see the unproductiveness of mechanical research into influences and parallels. Not to mention that Balkan provincialism with which counter-revolutionary literary history used to handle foreign references to Hungary. Let us call a halt to such so-called bibliographical or archival research in which we uncover certain allusions by foreigners to Hungary, that is, whether such-and-such a seventeenth-century English traveller enjoyed Hungarian food or not.

Comparative-literary history must not only concentrate its forces on the truly important Hungarian issues, it must also see that the foundations of every true literary manifestation – be it a writer, a tendency, or a genre – are the social necessities of the nation, the economic structure of Hungary at that

time, the developmental tendencies of its society, the articulation of its class-structure, and so on. Only these can explain who in Hungary was influenced by a particular foreign literary tendency or writer, or why and how this influence took place.

This viewpoint is further complemented by the fact that the manifestations of foreign literature demand revision like those of Hungarian literature. The history of foreign literatures is as much to be written anew as ours is. This necessity refers in the first instance to the world-literary histories written in Hungarian and quite widely disseminated (Mihály Babits, Antal Szerb),<sup>13</sup> as well as the relevant literary-historical studies, essays, and so on. The Hungarian literature of the counter-revolutionary period cannot be seriously judged without passing judgement on foreign tendencies ranging from expressionism to surrealism.

Finally, the issues of the revision of Hungarian literary history – in the final instance – are insoluble without aesthetic and philosophical clarity as well. The first order of business, here, is to wage an unrelenting battle against the idealistic world-view of Western decadence, without which our second main task, overcoming the subjectivist and formalist aesthetic, would be impossible. Among Hungarian essayists, especially in the analysis of poetry, an aesthetic irrationalism and subjectivism became fashionable, which, in essence, could only paraphrase, using all sorts of fancy epithets, the smacking of the lips with delight (oh, how lovely!) or their pursing up with disgust (oh, how ugly!). Such irrationalism led, in individual cases of aesthetic evaluation, to arbitrary over- and under-estimations. Moreover, it completely corrupted our terminology of both praise and deprecation, in so far as, for example, the expression ‘great writer’ became so general that the evaluation’s content was virtually eliminated from its expression.

A decisive occurrence opposed to this irrationalist subjectivism is the fact that, since 1945, the Marxist aesthetic has become known and has begun to exert its influence in Hungary as well. The most important principles of this aesthetic – the theory of reflection, the new determination of the concept of realism, etc. – are essential elements of the re-evaluation of Hungarian literature. Furthermore, it is very important that the ‘partisanship’-concept of Marxist philosophy become common knowledge among our literary historians. Only if, in the process of development itself, we recognise this vividly active partisanship and consciously make it our own – taking sides for progress – can we correctly interpret the true reality of the objective-historical process.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Lukács is referring to Babits 1936 and Szerb 1941.

14. See also Lukács’s ‘Poetry of the Party’, in this volume, for more on the concept of artistic partisanship and party-spiritedness.

In contrast, every so-called purely historical outlook, indifferent to politics, world-view, and aesthetics, or any aesthetically subjectivist, irrationalist, relativist literary history is condemned from the start to sterility.

If we pose the question in this way, we quickly catch sight of one of the important, negative aspects of our historical development: the lack of a Hungarian-philosophical culture. This statement of the facts is not something new: János Erdélyi had already lamented it. Of course, we must know that it is not just a matter of a simple absence, but rather – especially after 1867 – a lack of principles, which grew organically out of the unprincipled state of Hungarian social relations, and whose consequences many people sensed, even if they were not clear about the causes. The absence of philosophical culture was vividly manifest even in the progressive tendencies of their own times. In *Nyugat*, therefore, this appeared as an aestheticism that turned away from content and philosophical generalisation; it is clearly visible in Ernő Osvát, and even more strikingly, in Kosztolányi, but there are numerous remnants to be found in our present-day literature as well. Similarly connected to the lack of philosophical culture, the reaction to these formalistic conceptions was in most cases, the confrontation of the formalistic-literary outlook with purely thematic, nakedly political content. We saw this in István Tisza's<sup>15</sup> conservative polemic against *Nyugat*, and we often see this – however paradoxical the comparison might seem – in vulgar Marxism. It does not help this dualism a bit if, as occasionally happens especially among left-wing critics, we encounter an eclectic double-bookkeeping, in which philosophically-vulgarised progressiveness is coupled with an aesthetic evaluation that is independent of it. Such a method will always remain mired in the past.

The lack of philosophical culture that predominates in Hungary, and the lack of philosophical criticality that necessarily follows from it, contributes greatly to the unimpeded permeation of Hungary by the most reactionary world-views during the counter-revolutionary period (it suffices to allude to the relation with the '*Geisteswissenschaften*'). At the same time – especially in the populist-literary movement, but not only there – a soulless empiricism came into being as a flight into mere fact and away from decision on genuine philosophical issues. And, here, it is no accident that empiricism quite easily and quite often flips over into reactionary mysticism; many times, in populist romanticism, it went fully into racial theory. Thus, on this terrain, every door stands open to reactionary world-views, as in the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' themselves.

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15. As a leading conservative Hungarian politician and ideologue, Tisza saw in *Nyugat* a dangerous cultural force leading towards revolution and socialism.



Our task, in this area, is to take positions, bound to sharp, decisive, and unyielding criticism, against aesthetic and philosophical reaction and against decadence on the terrain of philosophy and art. The task of literary history is to research, in a theoretically and historically grounded fashion, the concrete, complex reciprocity of world-view and composition. This implies a struggle against any vulgarisation, any sort of simplification and distortion of reality, be it vulgar sociology, '*Geisteswissenschaften*', or eclectic double bookkeeping. In a previous lecture, I alluded to a pseudo-dilemma posed to our conventional literary outlook: the exclusive choice between Esti Kornél and Upton Sinclair.<sup>16</sup> It is a false dilemma. One must reject both.

The manifold and complex nature of our tasks imperatively imposes on us the necessity of collective work. We must debate, orally and in writing, and in the widest circles possible, the whole set of controversies regarding the revision of Hungarian literature. Our true methodology cannot be anything but collective in this sense. The question, however, arises: who should participate in this work? What has already been said should indicate the response: we must go beyond the mere literary, historical expertise. This in no way implies the deprecation of disciplinary knowledge, but, first and foremost, we must pose the question: where is that person who might be or could be an expert in the totality of the issues touched upon here? Least of all, the conventional type of literary historian. Disciplinary knowledge of literary history is extraordinarily important – indeed, essential – but we should never forget that its sum makes up only one aspect of that totality that is necessary for the genuine revision of Hungarian literary history.

Moreover, we must point out an important characteristic of the development of literary history to date – not, of course, something particular to Hungarian literary history. Indeed, it appears even more strikingly in independently founded literary history, which is not just the accumulation of foreign accomplishments, in the way that Hungarian literary history relates to German developments. We could formulate this characteristic briefly in the following way: new literary viewpoints – for better or worse – never emerge from the internal development of literary history, from literary history's own dialectic. Rather, these were always brought in from that which is external to the discipline of literary history: from poetics and poetic composition, from

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16. 'The Song of Esti Kornél' is a poem by the Hungarian poet and novelist Dézső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), who also created a set of witty and fantastic stories centred on his character Esti Kornél, a trickster, kleptomaniac *homo aestheticus*, who bears some distinct resemblances to the author (with whom he also collaborates to write the works bearing his name). Lukács here alludes to his own essay, 'Free or Directed Art?' (in this volume), in which he develops at greater length this predicament of (false) extremes, representing naturalism and aestheticism.



philosophy, from social science, from politics, and so on. Let us consider German-literary history from Herder to Friedrich Gundolf and, beyond them, up to the present day. The new viewpoints and methods were never introduced by literary-historical experts: either they were poets (Lessing, Schiller, Heine, and so on, or in our time, Stefan George), or philosophers (Schelling, Hegel, and such like, up to Dilthey and Simmel), or political journalists (Franz Mehring), and so on. There is no such instance in the transformation of German-literary history in which any essential renewal was initiated by a professional, literary historian. Even in the reactionary changes in the literary history of the imperialist period, experts in the narrow sense were only the community that applied and put into effect methods developed by others. This was our situation as well, with the only difference being that our literary history took over ready-made the reactionary methods produced by the Germans.

Our Literary-Historical Society must grasp this situation's full set of consequences. It must seek to assemble a broad team working in common, a broad collective. It should seek to put to work the disciplinary knowledge of literary historians; but it must also seek, on the one hand, to bring into our work those poets, authors, critics, etc. who are interested in every sort of literary problem, and on the other hand, to create an unbroken, lively connection with those engaged with social science and history, philosophy and aesthetics. Furthermore – to the extent that conditions allow – we must seek to draw into our work those politicians and journalists who are concerned with questions of literature and art. Last but not least, we must seek to activate the scholarly capacities of the greatest possible mass of teachers.

The revision now due in the history of Hungarian literature necessarily has a *universal* character. Precisely because we have united to carry out such a universal revision in both content and method, it is impossible, at this moment of commencing, to offer a comprehensive and content-specific programme. This would be to anticipate the results to be achieved, which is precisely what we do not want to do.

We can only emphasise a few main points of view. First and foremost: we cannot stress often and emphatically enough that the point of departure and basis of our research is none other than the concrete situation of the Hungarian people. Here, there immediately appears an issue that played a great role in previous Hungarian literary history: we are a small people, not included among the great nations that play a decisive role in the destiny of world-history. From this, for a long time, all kinds of conclusions were drawn, which were misleading in all sorts of ways. The most evident of these was a deep-rooted inflation of our world-literary status. Everything from so-called scholarly studies to school-assignments was imbued with this fundamental mentality. Every manifestation of Hungarian literature corresponded to some

parallel foreign one, and, in this comparison, the Hungarian work always showed to advantage. I recall from my time at the gymnasium that we were not allowed to write an assignment about Imre Madách's *Tragedy of Man* without showing how it stood in every respect far above Goethe's *Faust*.<sup>17</sup> (The provincial complement of such inflation is the discussion of 'foreign connections', about which we have already spoken.)

This inflation is puffed up into a 'theory', when out of some archaic Hungarian 'figure' – more or less racial – is derived the complete autonomy of Hungarian literature, its radical independence from any European development. From Zsolt Beöthy's sort of 'Volga horseman'<sup>18</sup> up to the present, we encounter various versions of this 'theory'.

The decadent complement and corollary of this world-literary inflation is the world-view of 'tragic Hungarianness', the philosophy of 'we are alone'. Here, the symptoms of gentried Hungary's decline merge with the irrationalist nihilism of Western decadence, not seeing and not wanting to see the immortality of the peasant-peoples, or those possibilities for national renewal that the coming to power of workers and peasants signifies for all peoples. It is a matter of the ideology of the declining gentry, even if, having donned populist colours, it appears in the movement of populist writers. Precisely in the present situation, it is important to see clearly that the peasant-romanticism that emerged in the counter-revolutionary period, even when subjectively it was intended to be oppositional, is not only directly or indirectly reactionary in its political line, but also presents a *spurious* peasantry, the projection of the ideology of the decadent gentry onto the peasantry.

This conception stands in the closest relation to the defeatism opposed to the possibility of the freedom and independence of the Hungarian nation, beginning with the 'destined' connection with the Habsburg monarchy (from Zsigmond Kemény to Gyula Szekfű), all the way up to the fatalistic or enthusiastic recognition of the alliance with Hitler.

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17. Lukács later set off a controversy with his 1955 article 'Madách tragédiája [Madach's Tragedy/The Tragedy of Madach]', which took a strongly critical view of Madach's celebrated work. The piece originally appeared in the Communist newspaper *Szabad Nép*.

18. In his popular 1896 study, Beöthy evokes a solitary 'Volga horseman', whose clear-sighted – anachronistically positivist – gazing into the flat, empty distances before him epitomises the Hungarian national character, past and present: 'This lonely horseman's image not only explains much of the ancient Hungarian way of life, but also the characteristics and development of the Hungarian soul. The whole spiritual life of the Hungarian nation markedly reveals those natural and moral influences that realised themselves in the ancient forms of life and were rooted in the Hungarian soul'. Cf. Beöthy 1896, p. 2. Beöthy's book is a typical reform-period ideological mélange of nationalist mythology and positivism.

The new world-situation that has come into being since the liberation has oriented the ultimate consequences of the tendency of 'Western-ness' in this reactionary direction. Earlier, 'Western-ness' still had a different tendency: appealing to Western developments meant relative progress compared to the Hungary of the Tisza period. Of course, here too, the fetishisation of this viewpoint set in, the misleading opposition of Western influence and home-grown literature, which led on a grand scale to the splitting-in-two of our literature development, the shattering of the progressive unity of Hungarian literature. We can see the 'Westward-leaning' tendencies in the period between the two world wars as a transitional phase between the two extremes sketched out here. It was relatively legitimate to oppose the bourgeois-democratic West to the Horthy period; yet, in seeking an opponent and antidote to Hungarian reaction exclusively in the West, they, on the one hand, obscured the relation that persisted unceasingly between the Horthy régime and Western imperialism, and on the other hand, they concealed from the Hungarian public that social and cultural regeneration that was taking place among the liberated Soviet people.

In opposition to all these misleading conceptions, we can only grasp the true development and the correspondingly correct ideology if we go back to the foundational-social issues of Hungarian history. The fundamental issue here is our economic and social backwardness, of which cultural backwardness is only a consequence. In turn, this backwardness – a well-known fact – can be traced to the much longer reign and experience of feudalism in Hungary than in any other country in Western Europe. Absolute monarchy, as the condition transitional to bourgeois democracy, which, in the West, necessarily came into being out of the economic and social collapse of feudalism, never existed for us, or only episodically, in a distorted form. This was especially because the urban culture that grew out of feudal society was much weaker in Hungary than in the West; and the absolutism of the Habsburgs, as a foreign rule, could not want to, and would not have been able to, fulfil those tasks that followed from the English or French form of absolute kingship. The struggles in Hungary at the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century were a battle for the elimination of the remnants of this development. Characteristic of Hungarian development was the leading role of the petty nobility and the numerical weakness of the bourgeois and plebeian strata.

The fundamental economic and social fact of the period extending from the 1848 Revolution to the liberation was that Hungary was following the 'Prussian road' of capitalist development. Lenin understood the 'Prussian road' to mean that sort of capitalist development that develops capitalism by means of outfitting with new functions the feudal division of land, and such like, which is maintained and preserved. In contrast, the 'American road' is where there

are none, or hardly any, of these remnants, where capitalism can transform the whole society in its own image.<sup>19</sup> (Clearly, the development of France created by the French Revolution is also such an ‘American road’.) This sort of economic and social development constitutes a certain parallelism between Hungarian, German, and Polish developments. Clarifying these comparabilities may be very instructive, though only, of course, if along with them we also stress the ways in which their developments diverge. For example, in all three cases, it is evident that the preservation of feudalism and the failure to form a national unity took very different concrete forms, which afterwards had decisive consequences for their differences in cultural development.

Only if we are clear about the fundamental-social characteristics of Hungarian history can we adequately interpret the singular character of the 1848 Revolution in our nation’s history. Then, and only then, did we stand on the same level with the most progressive developments in the contemporary world. Also part of a proper interpretation, of course, is to grasp how little were the leading Hungarian intellectuals of the time prepared for such a leaping upsurge. The fact that Petőfi *was* ready makes him an ideologically-singular phenomenon in Hungarian literature.

We have only become able to evaluate the special situation of the 1848 Revolution in Hungarian development since the entire Hungarian nation experienced a similar turn in its destiny: the liberation of 1945. Of course, we can only understand the literary significance of this turning point from the concrete history of social struggle. We can see, on the one hand, how much broader and more organised was the mass-basis of this transformation than in 1848; what a qualitative change it makes that the working class led this transformation and not, as before, the petty nobility or, as in earlier revolutions, the bourgeoisie or the urban, plebeian strata. On the other hand, we see that in the 1848 Revolution, the Hungarian people fought purely by means of their own forces, whereas, in the 1945 liberation, it was thanks to the Red Army that Hitler’s fascism was smashed and his Hungarian followers dispersed. Only in this light can we understand the literary consequences of this new turn as well. Accordingly, now it is not an isolated plebeian genius like Petőfi – standing alongside a handful of like-minded supporters and opposed by the majority who do not understand the change – but rather the class-conscious masses who lead and direct the transformation. Yet, at the same time, the fact that the transformation was not achieved through our own forces works as a brake on the elimination of the old ideologies. In addition, whereas in the 1848 Revolu-

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19. Lenin 1972a, pp. 217–429, especially Chapter 1.5: ‘Two Types of Bourgeois Agrarian Evolution’.

tion every talent that emerged in the reform-period could participate with their full powers, in the counter-revolutionary period – not by chance – the best were lost from the truly progressive camp (Béla Bartók, Gyula Derkovits, István Dési-Huber, Attila József, Miklós Radnóti).<sup>20</sup>

These great turning points determine the periodisation of Hungarian-literary history. In this matter, too, we must very clearly stress that periodisation is not an external issue; it is not a technical expedient for the sake of transparency. Rather, literature, as an organic, constitutive element of national life, is grouped into such epochs and periods as correspond to its inner development (and that of its correlates internationally). Of course, here we must attend to that fundamental argument of dialectics that in reality there are never any sharply drawn borders. Not only can the development of the life of significant writers fall in more than one literary period, wherein, of course, it is always worth concretely investigating whether in the case of the most important writers, a new period in their individual development might not also signify a new developmental period more generally (for example, with János Arany before and after 1848). It is also unquestionable that the literary tendencies of the preceding period live on into the new period, while the forerunners of the new tendencies already appeared in the previous epoch. The legitimacy of periodisation is thus determined by a view of the literary *totality*, whether in its view the essential changes and displacements of functions can be established. We should never interpret dates assigned by periodisation in a mechanically exclusive and rigid manner.

With these assertions, I think that we have established that, in Hungarian literary history, the 1848 Revolution signified the decisive turning point. As far as new literary developments preceding 1848 are concerned, it seems likely that the ideological and literary developments that prepared for the Revolution are grouped by the greatest international events of the civilised world of the time, the great French Revolution (cf. the Martinovics conspiracy) and the revolution of July 1830. It is even clearer that the decisive turning points in Hungarian literary development after 1848 are the 1867 Compromise and the 1918–19 revolutions. (Later, it will be the task of concrete research to show how the period extending from 1867 to 1918 divides into two parts, in which the border-line is marked by the entry of Hungarian economic and political development into the imperialist epoch.) By no means, however, can literature be periodised on a purely literary basis, as László Négyesy<sup>21</sup> did, for

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20. Lukács is pointing to all five important artists as direct or indirect victims of the counter-revolutionary period or of fascism.

21. László Négyesy (1861–1933), literary historian associated with the writers of *Nyugat*, and a member of the Hungarian Literary-Historical Society.

instance; according to him, the founding of the Hungarian Academy signified a new epoch in Hungarian literature, and so on.

Such periodisation of literary history, thus, signifies a struggle against both purely literary-historical, philological theories and formalistic theories, against the fetishised constructions of the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' (preromantic, *Biedermeier*, and so on). The sort of periodisation sketched out, here, implies that we must view literature in its own movement and the international reference-points of this movement. That is, the central task of literary history is to disclose the struggle of clashing tendencies in national life and in literature. In addition, of course, we cannot rest content with the merely literary characterisation of literary tendencies, much less with that which the representatives of individual literary tendencies thought of themselves and of their own activities and goals. The task of literary criticism is precisely to bring to light the *objective* social basis of the struggle of different groups and how divergent social forces were expressed in the world-views, the literary conceptions, and the literary works of the struggling tendencies.

The central issue is, therefore, the struggle between tendencies. And, here, the revision lies, precisely, in grasping these much more deeply and concretely, in their social, philosophical, and artistic dimensions, than has been the case previously. We have to raise the struggles of Hungarian literary tendencies to the highest theoretical level, lifting them out of the atmosphere of personal anecdote (note the relationship between Pál Gyulai and Lajos Tolnai, for instance).

If we lend such decisive weight to the struggle of tendencies, we, of course, still know very well that many great poets (Vörösmarty, Arany, Babits) can never be completely subsumed into some tendency. However, this is far from signifying that such writers stood outside the struggle of tendencies in their time, as if we had to discuss them as lonely geniuses unrelated and foreign to their age – or as if we had to grasp for some archetypal, unchangeable 'figure' to understand them. The neurasthenic sensitivity of Arany – as a special modern 'type' – is this sort of literary-historical legend widely disseminated in Hungary since Babits's essay about him.<sup>22</sup> I believe that if we can set the personality of Arany before and after 1848 (and particularly after 1867) in a concrete relation to the development of Hungarian society in this period, this 'riddle' is easily solvable. In such research, we must never forget that solitude and isolation are precisely concrete social-historical categories, and can be socially and historically concretised as precisely as full participation in some

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22. Babits 1917.

tendency. The analysis in such cases is more difficult and complicated, but it in no way changes the essence of how we conceive this matter or the method we engage.

Our situating the struggle of tendencies at the centre relates closely to the fact that the history of literary outlooks and of criticism must take on a much greater weight than has been the case up to now. It would be exceptionally important and instructive if monographic research would be done on the fate of individual poets and tendencies in Hungarian-public opinion. The class-viewpoints on social development manifest themselves more directly and tangibly in this sphere than in the works themselves. Every period is, in great measure, characterised by what it sees, what it emphasises, what it passes by, and – especially – why. Research into these issues also means clarifying how, in the thought of some period and its representatives, theoretical, political, and social views relate to aesthetics (in, for example, Gyulai, Péterfy, *Nyugat*, the populists, and so on). Here, too, we must go beyond the ‘immanent’ interpretation of such views, as well as beyond mere condemnation of apparently false, individual positions. We have to reveal the essence of the relations, influences, observations, limitations, etc. that appear here and their relation to the development of Hungarian society.

If we study these relations concretely, the weakness, lack of autonomy, and backwardness of Hungarian intellectual culture emerges insistently everywhere: there is no Hungarian philosophy. The social bases of this fact must be urgently sought out, because this lack is one of the most important ideological sources of the provincialism that surfaces quite often in Hungarian literature.

Provincialism, of course, cannot be conceived formally, as is often done here in Hungary, as if it consisted of a lack of Western cultivation. On the contrary. The many importations of the most modern Western ideologies or artistic directions represent the height of Hungarian provincialism. For the proper essence of provincialism is that it puffs up superficial problems into something essential and blinds itself to the true problems of the period. The scholastic academicism of the Hungarian university was such a provincialism, as was the uncritical appropriation of German ‘*Geisteswissenschaften*’ and French surrealism, etc. The ideological path to defeating provincialism is the development of intellectual culture, the correct generalisation of the age’s truly great issues, and concrete application of thought to national problems. It is no accident that the truly great philosophers came to light in the times of world-historical change among world-historical peoples (this is true of Spinoza as well). From this perspective, it is, again, decisively important that we recognise the radically new possibilities of our present situation for our intellectual culture: since the liberation, as part of a progressive world-movement,



we have the possibility of raising ourselves out of provincialism. In this sense, our situation today is once again analogous with the revolution in 1848. Today, there is the social possibility of grasping, generalising, and depicting with general validity, our age's central issues in Hungarian literature.

These perspectives grant the possibility for a productive revision of history. Because only from these can we truly understand the tendencies and attempts of the past, its references in the direction of the present, the degree of its successes and failures. Here, many newly emerging questions arise for Hungarian literary history (for example: János Erdélyi and the question of Hungarian Hegelianism).

With all this, our literature's artistic development is shown in a new light as well. It is a well-known fact that in Hungarian literature – in contrast to the development in the West and in Russia – lyric poetry is the dominant genre. The fact itself has for a long time been well-known, but, until now, only József Révai offered a method to account for it, in his study of Endre Ady.<sup>23</sup> He sees the basic problem – in my opinion, correctly – in the fact that the degree and character of more modern class-conflicts are interlaced with issues of Hungarian independence and nationality (and, again, the basis of this is the social continuation of feudalism). And, Révai very correctly adds, as a decisive element, that there is no Hungarian social force that could create unity out of the contradictions in this framework. The absence of such unity limits those genres that depict the large-scale social totality, the novel and drama, to a second-rate status, because only by lyrical means can artistic unity be forged in the objective absence of unity. In my opinion, this theory must be further developed, concretised, and further elaborated if we are to grasp correctly the fundamental problems of our literature's artistic development.

Here, too, the present solutions to our social problems are the key to interpreting the past. Révai correctly formulated the problem because in the Communist Party's theory is encompassed the pathway and method to a unified solution to the conflicts in Hungarian society. And, in so far as this thinking has been practically realised since the liberation, completely new possibilities have opened up for Hungarian literature and culture; in light of these possibilities, illuminated by a transformed and new social structure, the artistic greatness and problematicness of the whole previous period becomes transparent.

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23. Révai 1945.



Of course, we cannot schematise and vulgarise Révai's theory. He himself knows quite well, as do we, that in Hungarian literature there was *Bánk Bán*<sup>24</sup> (even if it was an exceptional, problematic, and not to be repeated phenomenon, whose characteristics are from our new perspective to be investigated); and that there were József Eötvös and Mór Jókai, Kálman Mikszáth and Zsigmond Móricz. Each among these names – and other lesser, but serious, novelists as well – in their own way registered a certain approach towards unifying the contradictions. And, here, we must investigate concretely in what way each writer saw the contradictions and their possible unification (and what of this was conscious, what was implicit in their artistic depictions); what remained hidden from them; what they achieved and where they remained behind. Only in this way will the concrete problems of style in the Hungarian drama and novel become intelligible. (For example, the anecdotal, narrative style.)<sup>25</sup> Following from this, one should also take up the question of Hungarian realism.

But there were also in Hungarian literature such epics as *János Vitéz* and *Toldi's Evening*.<sup>26</sup> These are, of course, as I indicated in my Arany essay,<sup>27</sup> socially-determined, isolated cases in the development of Hungarian literature – indeed, in that of world-literature as well. Here, the development of Hungarian society raised the possibility of a specifically new epic. This possibility was destroyed in 1849; the changing of this path into a dead-end is the true reason for the tragedy of Arany.

Thus, the establishment of lyric poetry's primacy in Hungarian literature responds to these facts. Yet, this statement is far from representing any kind of solution, rather it is just a posing of the problem. Concrete research does not end here; on the contrary, it starts here. Only from this point of departure is the relation between the Hungarian and European lyric determinable, especially around 1849 and in the imperialist epoch. (Consider, for instance, Ady's relation to his significant lyric contemporaries; Révai also makes reference to this.) The reason that Hungarian lyric poetry did not achieve international influence is not solely the unsuccessful attempts at translation. Rather, the

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24. *Bánk Bán*, a Hungarian historical drama, Katona 1815, narrates an episode in medieval Hungarian history. The play was also the source of an 1861 opera with the same title by Ferenc Erkel.

25. The anecdotal style was a traditional inheritance of Hungarian narrative; it reached its pinnacle in the ironic depictions of village life by Kálman Mikszáth.

26. *János Vitéz* ['Sir John'], 1845, a long, fantastical verse-narrative by Sándor Petőfi (1823–49); *Toldi Estéje* ['Toldi's Evening'], 1854, from a trilogy of verse-narrative poems centred on the medieval hero Miklós Toldi, by János Arany (1817–82).

27. Lukács 1948a, pp. 35–53.

basic experiences of Hungarian lyric poetry – emerging for the reasons sketched out above – had an aspect that was difficult to communicate to those who were not familiar with our nation's particular, problematic status. It would be very instructive in this regard to investigate why, among other small peoples before and during the imperialist epoch, the novel and drama became the leading genres; why were they able to have a broad international influence? (Consider, for example, Scandinavian literature.)

If we consider the history of genres and styles in this way, in this history will then be encompassed the whole fate of the Hungarian people, provided that we are able to decipher this fate from literature. And that is, of course, only possible if on the one hand, we research in a truly concrete way its social-historical situation, and on the other hand, if we do not vulgarise the relation between social base and artistic form.

The problems of Hungarian literary history that we have sketched out raise more concretely than previously the question of progress. We are now in a situation that we can more concretely determine the direction and content of progress and the concept of the progressive and revolutionary writer. Here, too, a decisive issue is the designation in our recent literary history of Petőfi's, Ady's, and Attila József's central place, as well as the elaboration of the concrete social and artistic reasons for this centrality. However, it can in no way follow from this that we do injustice to other great, significant, or talented writers, as has happened not a few times in our recent criticism. In his 15 March speech, József Révai very rightly emphasised that the evaluation of Petőfi's significance must not lead to the diminishment of, for example, Vörösmarty.<sup>28</sup>

First and foremost, it is, therefore, necessary to clarify the relation between progress and literature. The concept of progress must shed that abstract, often purely cultural, indeed purely literary quality, with which it was often employed in our bourgeois journalism and criticism. In the first instance, progress is an economic and social category. For a long time in Hungary, it signified the struggle against the remnants of feudalism, which in the impe-

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28. Lukács is likely referring to József Révai's 15 March 1948 speech in Kiskőrös, the birthplace of Petőfi, on the centenary of the 1848 Revolution, which the Communist Party was at pains to connect to the accelerated consolidation of Communist power set in motion in 1948. However, the printed version of the speech does not contain a passage corresponding to the argument Lukács references; it may have been stated only in oral delivery. In point of fact, the printed text is marked by a hardline Stalinist note, strongly emphasising the need to take decisive action against internal enemies, which Révai credits as another of Petőfi's legacies to present-day revolutionaries. See Révai 1960a, pp. 84–91.

rialist epoch was connected – of course in a very complicated way – with the struggles preparatory to socialism.

Consideration of this means that, for the writers of previous periods, we must, first and foremost, investigate the concrete possibilities of their concrete social and historical situation. It would be empty abstraction and rigid vulgarisation if we weighed the progressive aspects of earlier writers according to the viewpoint of how progressive they would be with respect to the position of our present-day perspective. The task of philosophical culture and social philosophy is to analyse concretely in every individual case what the progressive world-view was in the given situation. Furthermore, there is also a very important difference between revolutionary and progressive positions, so that we do not force unjust judgements upon significant writers who, in their own time, represented progress, but without becoming revolutionaries in consequence of their class-situation and their individual development. Of course, we must not abstractly schematise this difference either. Precisely in the periods of great social crises, it happens that some world-view that yesterday still represented progress takes on a conservative, even reactionary aspect during the revolutionary crisis. This is especially relevant to the revolutionary turns in 1848 and 1918–19 and with the 1945 liberation.

From the particularity of the Hungarian development sketched out, it follows that the contradictions of capitalism, complicated by the 'Prussian road' of Hungarian development, play a very important role in what and to what degree we can see progress in the previous development of Hungarian literature. Marx indicated that bourgeois thought was not capable of extricating itself from the false dilemma between capitalist apologetics and romantic anti capitalism. This dilemma has incessantly reappeared in our recent development in ever more intensive forms, and it is impossible to evaluate properly recent Hungarian literary history without seeing through the false and deceitful aspect of this dilemma (for example, in the conflict of urbanists and populists).

Finally, by all means, it is necessary that we aesthetically clarify the relation of world-view and depiction from the standpoint of progress. Here, it is only the Marxist aesthetic that points out a concrete way forward, in so far as only this theory can explain how works of art can lead to the adoption of a higher-order, more progressive position than seemed predestined by the writer's consciously assumed world-view (see Engels on Balzac, Lenin on Tolstoy). The concrete application of this theory is called to play a major role in the revision of our literature. But, again, only if we do not vulgarise it, as has been the case in many studies since the liberation. The 'victory of realism', of which Engels spoke, is not meant to show 'in the last instance'

the 'progressive' side of any essentially reactionary writer; nor is it intended that, with its help, we should gloss over the internally problematic character of individual great writers. This theory allows one to establish the concrete criteria for the progressive or non-progressive character of the work of art, but only if the method is exercised in a correct, concrete, dialectical grasp of all the social and historical, individual and artistic elements.

This sort of concretisation of the concept of progress offers a way of fighting against still massive, old remnants and reactionary tendencies in our literature and literary history. Already, earlier, we treated in detail a significant portion of these, the conservatism of the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' and the conception of 'tragic' Hungarianness. Today, we must, especially, stress the struggle against the pro-Western orientation, which is manifest in the most various forms, in part as allegedly impartial humanism, in part, and especially, as the identification of progress with Western development.

If we consider the history of this latter position, then it is very interesting to see that Ady, already before World War I – in sharp contrast to *Nyugat* – saw clearly that this identification did not correspond to the facts. And with correct instinct, he alluded to the popular-revolutionary movements beginning in Asia. That which Ady hinted at brilliantly, Lenin grasped with scientific precision when, at the same time, he contrasted the ever increasing, imperialistic parasitism and degeneration of the developed capitalist states in the West with the nascent, revolutionary coming-to-consciousness of those peoples who were more backwards in capitalist terms. With the victory of the Russian Revolution in 1917, a decisive turn occurred in the relation between progress and reaction. After this turn – in the last instance – this is the decisive criterion for the progressive or reactionary aspect of some individual or tendency: how they relate to such a transformation of the world, to the new perspectives for humanity that are opening up, here. In this connection, then, the relation and difference of revolutionary and progressive writers again receives a new interpretation.

Since, until now, progress that carried over into practice appeared only in the short, inconsequential flash in Hungarian life in 1848 and in the 1945 liberation, it is unquestionable that in the period between these two dates it is most complicated to determine precisely, concretely, and correctly the true character of progress. Here, we can only refer to a few main viewpoints.

The period extending from 1848 to 1945 constituted a slide downward, in two senses, from the heights achieved in the war of independence. First of all, such a deterioration meant the fetishistic glorification of our backwardness. This appeared in an honest and open form in Pál Gyulai and, especially, in Zsigmond Kemény; in their followers, however, it hardened into hypocritical

academicism. Such glorification of backwardness appeared in a particularly fetishised form in the Hungarian '*Geisteswissenschaften*'. But this also pertains to populist theories as well. In their case, we can generally distinguish two – in practice, often mixed – tendencies. On the one hand, the populist opposition, although full of peasant limitations, but still opposed to the old gentry Hungary; and on the other hand, the 'populisation' of the gentry reaction. Here, we should seriously analyse the characteristics of romantic anticapitalism and the particular character of its manifestations in Hungary. Because only a critique of the internal contradictions of romantic anticapitalism can lead to an understanding of the new, reactionary significance of today's peasant-'oppositonality'.

The other issue is the critique of previous notions of progress. The measure can only be: how, and in what, do these notions view Hungarian backwardness, and how do they intend to change it? Again, the central place of Petőfi, Ady, and Attila József comes up here, because they wanted to eradicate with revolutionary means the social roots of Hungarian backwardness. Such clear-sightedness was missing in most writers, and thus we must concretely analyse in each case what were the social, philosophical, individual, etc. reasons for this absence of clear-sightedness. In the final instance, of course, in the majority of cases it is a matter of not recognising – not even emotionally or conjecturally – the 'Prussian road' of Hungarian development, its socially and culturally problematic nature, and thus, they sought more civilised forms of the 'Prussian road'. But, even if we establish this, the question emerges when, and under what concrete social and political conditions, such a position is realised. (Consider the difference between the old and new *Nyugat*, but especially the circle of *Szép Szó* ['Beautiful Word'].)

All this has extraordinarily important philosophical and aesthetic consequences. For, if some writer or tendency does not touch upon the bases of society, or, furthermore, he wants only to make them more cultured without changing them essentially, then a cultural utopia without social foundation comes into being. Rather, in consequence of a fear of radical transformation and of its agent, the masses, there arises not only utopia but also philosophical and artistic provincialism, full of reactionary element and along with these, often a sort of decadent Balkan Parisianness. Of course, here too, there are very big differences. In Babits, the social collapse of his cultural utopia was transformed into an artistically honest, pessimistic lyricism of disillusionment; in certain parts of the circles of *Nyugat* and *Szép Szó*, however, it led to careless opportunism and a 'Realpolitik' built on sand.

One way in which philosophical and artistic decadence intruded into Hungary, was the failure of recognising the 'Prussian road'; another was

the gentroid transformation of populist literature. Both tendencies were strengthened and supported – of course, in separate and different ways, indirect or direct – by the reigning, reformist tradition of the social-democratic movement, whose main principle was the alliance of the workers and the ‘progressive’ bourgeoisie, as the way leading out of the contradictions. This reformist tradition was one of the main reasons why the Hungarian working class took on a leading, path-finding role only so late; and it is also the reason why working-class culture could not influence, in a directive way, writers suffering amidst the contradictions of bourgeois culture. With this, of course, we are drawing only the most general, crude outline of this complex of problems, and again, we must underscore that these productive viewpoints applied to literature must never turn into a rigid schema.

Naturally, a proper discussion of Hungarian literature continually brings to new light the tragedy of many great or significant writers. But the recognition and interpretation of individual tragedies must not lead to any sort of tragic or pessimistic world-view. For an individual’s socially and artistically concretised tragedy is something completely different than the ‘tragic world-view’ of the declining classes.

From the discussion up to this point, it becomes clear that the *whole* of Hungarian literary history must be revised. This, however, does not contradict the fact that the revision of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary history, as the most immediate and all-the-more rapidly-fulfilled task, should stand in the foreground. There is no question that it is, here, that everyone senses the greatest urgency of revision. Without this revision we cannot intervene in a scholarly-grounded and hence path-indicating way in the problems of present-day literature. Without this revision, the problem of the proper instruction of literature in schools is completely insoluble, etc., etc. But these social demands not only ascribe this priority to recent literature; they also account for the fact that this task is more quickly and easily carried out. The social basis of this literature is in part better-known, while, in part, in so far as it still has not been researched with sufficient thoroughness, it can be more easily known and clarified, at least as much as is necessary for grounded literary research. Finally, we should not forget that – aside from a few exceptional personalities – the previous literature that now has a living influence, is the literature of that period of which we have now been speaking. It is a necessary consequence of Hungarian historical development that our literature cannot have the almost millennia-long continuity and the influential power that English or French literature has had, up to the present.

Of course, research and re-evaluation of older literature is by no means excluded. But, here, especially, is a great difficulty, that the structure of the old Hungarian society and the true process of earlier Hungarian history have been much less clarified than those of more recent times. Thus, autonomous, complementary research by literary historians is much more difficult methodologically and materially than for recent periods. (One might say that, until now, only Erik Molnár has made a serious scholarly attempt to clarify our early social structure).<sup>29</sup>

Finally – in the interest of avoiding any possible misunderstanding – we must openly state that the radical revision of the whole of Hungarian literary history does not mean, and cannot mean, the summary dismissal of all previous research. It means only an unprejudiced, relentlessly strict criticism of everything that Hungarian literary history has produced until now; a criticism that takes a stand in the present for democracy and socialism. Certainly, the image of Hungarian literary history will have to change a great deal in the course of this revision and in consequence of it. But, it is also certain that in the midst of this work, such precursors will appear, whom, until then, we had not thought about at all, or else very little. On the other hand, there will be many idols to topple and personalities to be criticised sharply; those who, until now, have been counted among the progressives with little justification or completely without good reason. This criticism should not stop anywhere, not even with the so-called established facts. There are many so-called facts that, really, only conceal a kind of deeply fixed legend, for example, in so far as other complementary, altering, or even contradicting facts have been set aside. We know not a few examples of facts that for centuries were considered unquestionable, which, nevertheless, in reality had no foundation at all. Criticism, thus, must not know forbearance. We have no reason to fear such criticism because, despite the whole problematic nature of Hungarian social development, there has been so much progressive tendency and so many talented and progressive writers in Hungarian literature that we are convinced that we will see, through this criticism, to greater literary riches than previously, although the contents and contours of these riches will be completely different than they were in the old Hungarian literary history.

1948

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29. Lukács is referring to Molnár 1945, essays on early Hungarian history.





# Historical, Literary, and Biographical Glossary

Ady, Endre (1877–1919), Hungary's most celebrated modern poet and fierce critic of the culture and politics of the last decades of the Habsburg domination in Hungary; connected to *Nyugat*.

Aeschylus (c. 525–455 B.C.), Greek tragedian.

Andreyev, Leonid (1871–1919), Russian playwright and short-story writer; a politically-revolutionary founder of expressionist writing in Russian.

Arany, János (1817–82), Hungarian poet and ballader of republican orientation.

Arrow Cross Party, Hungarian Nazi movement, which formed a short-lived, but extremely violent, anti-Jewish collaborationist régime in October 1944 following the German occupation of Hungary and their taking of Miklós Horthy into 'protective custody' in Germany.

Artsybasev, Mikhail (1878–1927), Russian naturalist writer who scandalised his audiences with frankly sexualised scenes.

Babits, Mihály (1883–1941), one of the most important Hungarian poets and literary intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century; closely associated with *Nyugat*; his *Jonas könyve* ['Book of Jonas', 1939], considered to be his greatest poetic achievement, engages in an anguished self-reflection on the limits of the attempt to withdraw from the larger world.

Bachofen, Johann Jakob (1815–87), Swiss classical historian and anthropologist, best known for his theory of primitive matriarchy developed in his book, *Mutterrecht* (1861).

Bajza, József (1804–58), Hungarian poet and critic.

*Bánk Ban* (1815/1819), a Katona play about a medieval viceroy opposing foreign usurpers; was understood as a protest against Habsburg domination of Hungary and was staged at the National Theatre on 15 March 1848, thus ceremonially marking the outbreak of the independence-insurrections; the source of an 1861 opera with the same title by Ferenc Erkel.

Bartók, Béla (1881–1945), Hungarian composer and ethnographer who utilised folk materials collected from the ethnically diverse regions of the Carpathian Basin in the composition of modern works of music.

Bäumler, Alfred (1887–1962), German philosopher especially concerned with the work of Nietzsche; an important ideological source for national socialism.

Beaumarchais, Pierre-Augustin Caron de (1732–99), French playwright and supporter of the American and French Revolutions.

Belinsky, Vissarion (1811–48), Russian literary critic and Liberal ideologist.

Beöthy, Zsolt (1848–1922), conservative Hungarian literary historian; his popular *A Magyar Irodalom Kis-Tükre* ['Little Mirror of Hungarian Literature', 1896] evokes a solitary 'Volga horseman' who epitomises the Hungarian national character, past and present.

Béranger, Pierre-Jean de (1780–1857), French songwriter whose works are imbued with popular, even socialistic spirit.

Berzeviczy, Albert (1853–1936), major conservative figure in Hungarian cultural and educational politics both during the dual monarchy and the counter-revolutionary period between the world wars; President of the Hungarian PEN club from 1932 to 1936.

- Berzsenyi, Dániel (1776–1836), a key Hungarian poet who worked in both classical and romantic styles; his poetic work was derailed by a devastating review by Kölcsey.
- Bethlen, István (1874–1946), prime minister of Hungary from 1921 to 1931; a leading figure in the interwar counter-revolutionary government.
- Bibó, István (1911–79), an outstanding liberal political theorist, politician, and lawyer, who authored a number of key essays on topics such as the difficulties of the postwar-democracy, the political problems of Central Europe's small states, and anti-Semitism in Hungary. Bibó was an important participant in the 1956 uprising in Hungary; he was arrested in 1958 and sentenced to life imprisonment, but was released in the 1963 amnesty.
- Boileau-Despréaux, Nicholas (1636–1711), French poet and critic; translator of Longinus's treatise on the sublime and author of *L'art poétique*, influenced strongly by Horace; participated in the debate about the relative merits of the ancients and moderns (and defended the ancients).
- Börne, Karl Ludwig (1786–1837), Jewish-German poet; along with Heinrich Heine, a key figure in the Young Germany literary movement.
- Bourget, Paul (1852–1935), French novelist; criticised naturalism for its excessive concentration on physiology and the body, favouring instead an exploration of psychology, the observation of inner states, and a dogmatic moralism that has often led critics to see his work as exemplary of a '*littérature à thèse*'.
- Bürger, Gottfried August (1748–94), German poet and target of Friedrich Schiller's stringent criticism.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1795–1881), Scottish essayist, historian, and cultural critic.
- Céline, Louis-Ferdinand (1894–1961), French novelist and anti-Semite condemned as a collaborator during World War II.
- Chamberlain, Houston Stewart (1855–1927), British-born philosopher and anti-Semitic writer, husband of Eva Wagner, the daughter of composer Richard Wagner.
- Chamberlain, Neville (1869–1940), Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1937 to 1940; most notorious for his appeasement of Hitler in the 1938 Munich Agreement, which ceded the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia to the Third Reich.
- Chenier, André (1762–94), French poet and revolutionary who was executed on Robespierre's orders during the Terror.
- Chernyshevsky, Nikolai (1828–89), Russian writer, philosopher, and socialist; author of the novel *What Is to Be Done?*.
- Cloots, Anacharsis (1755–94), French revolutionary and orator.
- Croce, Benedetto (1866–1952), Italian idealist philosopher, literary critic, and historian.
- Csontváry, Tivadar (1853–1919), Hungarian autodidact, visionary painter.
- Czigány, Dezső (1883–1937), Hungarian painter.
- da Vinci, Leonardo (1452–1512), Italian Renaissance artist, inventor, and scientist.
- Daladier, Édouard (1884–1970), Prime Minister of France between 1938 and 1940.
- Damjanich, János (1804–49), general in the Hungarian independence-struggle; of Serbian origin.
- Darvas, József (1912–73), Hungarian populist novelist and playwright, politically on the plebeian left-wing of the populist movement.
- Deák, Ferenc (1803–76), outstanding statesman, Hungarian Minister of Justice, and key inspiration for the reformist Compromise that formed the Austrian-Hungarian dual monarchy of 1867.
- Déry, Tibor (1894–1977), Hungarian novelist, playwright, and poet; associated early in his career with the avant-garde and with surrealism; joined the Communist Party in 1918 and was forced into exile after the collapse of the Hungarian Council-Republic of 1919; after returning in the 1930s to Hungary, was imprisoned by the Horthy government for translating André Gide's book on the Soviet Union; was subjected to persecution under the Stalinist dictatorship and expelled from the Party; following the 1956 uprising, was imprisoned again until 1961.

- Derkovits, Gyula (1894–1934), left-wing Hungarian painter of the interwar years.
- Descartes, René (1596–1650), French rationalist philosopher and founding figure of modern science.
- Dési-Huber, István (1895–1944), left-wing Hungarian painter of the interwar years.
- Diderot, Denis (1713–84), French philosopher of the Enlightenment, encyclopedist, writer, and critic.
- Dimitrov, Georgi (1882–1949), Bulgarian Communist leader.
- Dobruľubov, Nikolay (1836–61), Russian critic, journalist, and revolutionary.
- Dóczy, Lajos (1845–1918), Hungarian-Jewish dramatist and writer.
- Einstein, Albert (1879–1955), German-born physicist, renowned for his development of the general and special theories of relativity.
- Engels, Friedrich (1820–95), German political theorist, philosopher, and social scientist. Along with Karl Marx, author of *The Communist Manifesto*.
- Eötvös, József (1813–71), renowned Hungarian statesman and novelist especially known for his Hungarian-themed historical novels.
- Epicurus (341–240 BC), Greek philosopher associated with an ethics of happiness, friendship, and freedom from fear and pain.
- Erdei, Ferenc (1910–71), Hungarian sociologist, politician, and writer connected to the populist movement.
- Erdélyi, János (1814–68), Hungarian poet, critic, folklorist, and Hegel-influenced philosopher.
- Farkas, Mihály (1904–65), Communist politician and major figure in the Hungarian Communist leadership during the Hungarian Stalinist dictatorship; Minister of National Defence between 1948 and 1953.
- Ferenczy, Károly (1862–1917), Hungarian impressionist painter and major figure in the Nagybánya artist colony.
- Flaubert, Gustave (1821–80), French novelist best known for his novels *Madame Bovary* (1857) and *Sentimental Education* (1869).
- Forster, Georg (1754–94), German travel-writer, journalist, and revolutionary.
- France, Anatole (1844–1924), French novelist and essayist, key literary figure of the Left during the Dreyfus affair.
- Freiligrath, Ferdinand (1810–76), German poet who began his career under the influence of Byron and Victor Hugo; resisted at first the subordination of poetry to political tendency, but, during the 1840s, developed into a major revolutionary-partisan voice in literature; worked for a time on the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* under the editorship of Karl Marx.
- Frobenius, Leo (1873–1938), German archeologist and ethnographer; introduced concept of ‘*paideuma*’, a cultural morphology organic to certain economic forms.
- Fülep, Lajos (1885–1971), Hungarian art-historian and aesthetician.
- Füst, Milán (1888–1967), outstanding Hungarian novelist and poet.
- Gard, Roger Martin du (1881–1958), French novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1937.
- Gassendi, Pierre (1592–1655), French philosopher, scientist, mathematician.
- George, Stefan (1868–1933), German poet and founder of an ultra-conservative, mystical literary and academic circle, the ‘George circle’, which included figures such as Friedrich Gundolf, Ernst Kantorowicz, and Ludwig Klages.
- Georgi Plekhanov (1857–1918), Russian philosopher, socialist theorist, and founding figure in Russian Social Democracy.
- Gerő, Ernő (1898–1980), Communist politician and major figure in the Hungarian-Communist leadership during the Stalinist dictatorship of 1948–53.
- Gide, André (1869–1951), French novelist and winner of Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947.
- Gimes, Miklós (1917–58), Communist journalist and politician; expelled from the Party in 1955 for calling for the rehabilitation of László Rajk, who had been show-tried and executed in 1949; deeply involved in the 1956 uprising and executed in 1958 for treason.
- Giono, Jean (1895–1970), French writer strongly associated with an anti-modern celebration of peasant-individualism,

- in opposition to industrialism, urbanism, collectivism, and war.
- Giotto (1267–1337), Italian painter who is considered a key figure in the transition between medieval and early Renaissance culture in Italy.
- Gobineau, Joseph-Arthur de (1814–82), French novelist and race-theorist.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1749–1832), German writer and key-figure of Weimar classicism.
- Gogol, Nikolai (1809–52), Russian novelist, short-story writer, and playwright; famous for his satirical imagination.
- Gömbös, Gyula (1886–1936), conservative prime minister of Hungary from 1932 to 1935.
- Goncharov, Ivan (1812–91), Russian novelist and author of *Oblomov* (1859).
- Görgey, Artúr (1818–1916), Hungarian who was made military dictator towards the end of the 1848–9 independence struggle; surrendered to the Russians, and though interned was not executed, which led to his being considered by many to be a traitor.
- Gorky, Maxim (1868–1936), Russian and Soviet novelist and playwright. Founding influence on 'Socialist Realist' literary method.
- Gulácsy, Lajos (1882–1932), Hungarian painter known for his fantastic private mythology and visionary scenes.
- Gundolf, Friedrich (1880–1931), Hungarian literary historian, poet, and member of the Stefan George circle.
- Gyulai, Pál (1826–1909), Hungarian literary historian, art-critic, and poet.
- Halász, Gábor (1901–45), liberal Hungarian literary critic and essayist, associated with the progressive-'urbanist' journal, *Nyugat*; an opponent of fascism who fell victim to wartime forced labour.
- Hamvas, Béla (1897–1968), Hungarian philosopher and essayist whose interest in mysticism and esoteric spirituality led to his prohibition from publishing and the suppression of his works after 1948; having fallen into oblivion under socialism, his substantial body of writings have been rediscovered and published following the political changes of 1989.
- Hatvany, Lajos (1880–1961), Hungarian writer and critic; a key figure in left-liberal émigré circles following the collapse of the 1918–19 revolutions in Hungary; published several important articles, books, and documents related to Ady's life and work.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770–1831), German-idealist philosopher.
- Heine, Heinrich (1797–1856), poet, journalist, essayist, and adherent of the revolutionary-democratic movement in Germany; left Germany in 1831 and lived the rest of his life in Paris.
- Helvétius, Claude-Adrien (1715–71), Enlightenment-philosopher and man of letters.
- Herczeg, Ferenc (1863–1954), conservative Hungarian-nationalist playwright.
- Herwegh, Georg (1817–75), German poet and radical democrat.
- Herzen, Alexander (1812–70), Russian writer.
- Holbach, Paul-Henri Dietrich, baron d' (1723–89), French philosopher of the Enlightenment and encyclopedist.
- Holnap*, the very popular paper of the Hungarian Freedom Party; formed in 1946 under the leadership of Dezső Sulyok following the extorted expulsion of 20 members of the Smallholders' Party; in 1947, Sulyok was forced into exile and the Freedom Party was dissolved.
- Horthy, Miklós (1868–1957), Hungarian counter-revolutionary 'Regent' of the restored Kingdom of Hungary from 1920 to 1944, when he was deposed by the Nazi occupation of Hungary and the installation of the collaborationist Arrow Cross régime.
- Horváth, János (1878–1961), Hungarian literary historian and influential university professor up to the consolidation of the Communist dictatorship in 1948.
- Horváth, Márton (1906–87), key Communist literary and cultural ideologue of Hungarian Stalinism.
- Horváth, Zoltán (1900–67), left-wing Social-Democratic journalist and historian; arrested by Communists in 1949 and sentenced to life in prison in show trial in 1950, freed and rehabilitated during the 1956 events.
- Hugo, Victor (1802–85), French novelist and poet.

- Ibsen, Henrik (1828–1906), Norwegian playwright and major figure in the development of European naturalist drama.
- ‘Ignotus’ (Veigelsberg, Hugo, 1869–1949), Hungarian writer and critic who served as the main editor of *Nyugat* between 1908 and 1929.
- Ignotus, Pál (1901–78), left-liberal Hungarian journalist and editor; son of the founder of *Nyugat*, Hugó Ignotus; helped found with Attila József the literary journal, *Szép Szó*, which appeared between 1936 and 1939; a key representative of the progressive-‘urbanist’ tendency in interwar-literary culture; imprisoned under the Stalinist dictatorship in 1949 on a fabricated espionage charge; freed in March 1956.
- Illyés, Gyula (1902–83), Hungarian populist poet and novelist.
- Jacobsen, Jens Peter (1847–85), Danish novelist and poet.
- Jókai, Mór (1825–1904), Hungarian dramatist and novelist; a participant in the 1848 Revolution, and author of many works dealing with Hungarian historical themes in a Walter Scott-influenced vein.
- József, Attila (1905–37), the leading left-wing lyric poet of the interwar-years; of impoverished proletarian origins and in the illegal Hungarian Communist Party until 1931; canonised as a pillar of the Communist-literary pantheon after World War II.
- Kállai, Ernő (or Ernst Kállai) (1890–1954), major Hungarian art-critic and art-historian associated with modernistic and avant-garde tendencies in visual art; a defender in the 1920s of the Bauhaus and constructivist currents; later embraced a more surrealist-oriented ‘bio-romantic’ abstraction; worked in London and Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s; returned in 1935 to Hungary, where he worked as a journalistic art-critic; was an instructor at the Academy of Applied Arts in Budapest from 1946 to 1948.
- Kant, Immanuel (1724–1804), German philosopher of the Enlightenment.
- Kardos, László (1898–1987), Hungarian left-wing literary historian.
- Katona, József (1791–1830), Hungarian playwright, poet, and author of *Bánk Bán*.
- Kazinczy, Ferenc (1759–1831), Hungarian writer and translator who was crucial to the restoration of the Hungarian language.
- Keller, Gottfried (1819–90), Swiss-German novelist and short-story writer.
- Kemény, Katalin (1909–2004), Hungarian writer and wife of Béla Hamvas.
- Kemény, Zsigmond (1814–75), Hungarian author who, following the failure of the independence struggle of 1848–9, provided grounds for compromise with Austria (the Austro-Hungarian ‘dual monarchy’ Compromise of 1867) and helped create the political basis for the reform period.
- Kerényi, Károly (Karl) (1897–1973), Hungarian scholar of classical myth and member of the *Sziget* intellectual circle of the 1930s; collaborator with Carl Gustav Jung.
- Kodály, Zoltán (1882–1967), Hungarian composer; along with Bartók, he participated in ethnographic missions to collect folk-music from the Carpathian basin, incorporating the materials into modern compositions such as his stage works *Háry János* (1926) and *The Transylvanian Spinning-Room* (1924–32).
- Koestler, Arthur (1905–83), Hungarian-born Communist activist and writer; following World-War II, an apostate and major anti-Communist voice.
- Kölcsey, Ferenc (1790–1838), Hungarian poet, critic, and liberal political figure.
- Korolenko, Vladimir (1853–1921), Russian-Ukrainian short-story writer, journalist, and humanitarian activist.
- Kossuth, Lajos (1802–94), Hungarian revolutionary leader in the 1848–9 independence-struggles.
- Kosztolányi, Dezső (1885–1936), Hungarian novelist, poet, and literary journalist closely connected to *Nyugat*.
- Kovács, Béla (1908–59), Hungarian leader in the Smallholders’ Party in Hungary and Minister of Agriculture 1945–6; arrested in 1947 by Soviet officials on dubious charges of having plotted with Western occupation-forces and

- sentenced to imprisonment in Siberia; released in 1956.
- Kovács, Imre (1913–80), Hungarian writer and politician connected with the populist movement between the World Wars; after the War, was in the leadership of the National Peasants' Party, but emigrated to Switzerland in 1947 to escape arrest by the Communists.
- Kraus, Karl (1874–1936), Austrian journalist, cultural critic, playwright, and poet; his biting journalism and language-critical satire commanded high respect from a wide range of Austrian and German intellectuals, from the architect Adolf Loos and playwright Frank Wedekind to younger left-wing writers such as Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Elias Canetti.
- Krúdy, Gyula (1878–1933), considered one of the masters of Hungarian modern prose.
- Labriola, Antonio (1843–1902), Italian Marxist theorist, influential on the thinking of Antonio Gramsci and other Italian Marxists.
- Lafargue, Paul (1842–1911), French Marxist journalist and critic; son-in-law of Karl Marx.
- Leiningen-Westerburg, Károly (1814–49), general in the Hungarian independence-struggle.
- Lenin, Vladimir (1870–1924), Russian revolutionary, Bolshevik leader, and head of the Soviet state from 1917 to 1924.
- Lermontov, Mikhail (1814–41), Russian painter and writer who is, after Pushkin, considered the most influential Russian poet of the nineteenth century; an exemplary figure of literary romanticism.
- Lessing, Gotthold (1729–81), philosopher and playwright who is considered one of the leading German figures of the Enlightenment.
- Louis-Philippe I (1773–1850), the so-called 'Citizen's Monarch' or 'bourgeois king'; reigned as a liberal monarch between the end of the July Uprising of 1830 that brought him to power and the February Revolution of 1848, which deposed him.
- Madách, Imre (1823–64), Hungarian poet, author of the dramatic poem, *Az ember tragédiája* ['The Tragedy of Man', 1861].
- Major, Tamás (1910–86), Hungarian actor, manager of the Hungarian National Theatre (1945–62), and head director of Hungarian National Theatre (1962–67).
- Mannheim, Karl (1893–1947), Hungarian-born sociologist closely who, in his early intellectual formation, was a disciple of Lukács; articulated the bases of the sociology of knowledge in works such as *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) and *Conservatism* (1935).
- Márai, Sándor (1900–89), notable Hungarian novelist, diarist, and essayist; expressed his opposition to Nazism during the 1930s and 40s through 'inner emigration'; following the War, his anti-Communism led him into actual emigration in 1948; died by suicide in San Diego.
- Marat, Jean-Paul (1743–93), French revolutionary journalist and leading voice of the plebeian extreme Left in the Revolution, assassinated by Charlotte Corday.
- Martinovics, Ignác (1755–95), leader of the Hungarian Jacobins; his organisation was suppressed in 1794; executed in 1795.
- Marx, Karl (1818–83), German revolutionary philosopher, historian, and political theorist; along with Friedrich Engels, author of *The Communist Manifesto*.
- Maurer, Georg Ludwig von (1790–1872), German historian and state official; cited by Marx as a source on economic history; credited by Engels with having established that communal property was the original form of Germanic society.
- Maurras, Charles (1868–1952), ultra-nationalist French writer and critic; central thinker in the Action française Right-wing political movement.
- Mayakovsky, Vladimir (1893–1930), Russian futurist and Soviet poet.
- Mehring, Franz (1846–1919), Marxist journalist and historian, biographer of Karl Marx; in the last years of his life, one of the leaders of the revolutionary Spartacus League, along with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.
- Merezhkovsky, Dmitri (1865–1941), Russian critic and historical novelist; a key articulator of symbolist doctrine that interpreted historical events such as the 1905 Revolution in a mystical sense.



- Mikszáth, Kálmán (1847–1910), Hungarian politician, novelist, and journalist, famous for depiction of village-society.
- Mirabeau, Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de (1749–91), French writer, orator and statesman.
- Molnár, Erik (1894–1966), Hungarian historian and Communist politician.
- Molnár, Ferenc (1878–1952), popular Hungarian novelist and playwright; an active writer in Hollywood later in life.
- Montherlant, Henri Millon de (1896–1972), French essayist, novelist, and dramatist; especially notorious for the scandalous tetralogy, *Les Jeunes Filles* (1936–9), expressed deep hatred of the Third Republic and sympathy for Nazi Germany.
- Morgan, Lewis Henry (1818–81), American anthropologist who established the cultural evolutionary schema of savagery, barbarism, and civilisation in his work, *Ancient Society* (1877).
- Móricz, Zsigmond (1879–1942), left-leaning Hungarian realist novelist associated with both *Nyugat* and the Hungarian populist literary and political movement; one of the most outstanding fiction writers of early twentieth-century Hungary.
- Nagy, István (1904–77), Hungarian-Communist novelist and writer of short stories.
- Nagy, Lajos (1883–1954), Hungarian novelist and documentary-writer; was associated before the War with *Nyugat* and several left-wing periodicals; joined the Communist Party in 1945.
- Négyesy, László (1861–1933), Hungarian-literary historian associated with the writers of *Nyugat*.
- Németh, László (1901–75), Hungarian-populist novelist, playwright, critic, and utopian-social thinker; put forward a national characterology distinguishing between ‘deep Hungarians’ and ‘shallow Hungarians’, which consigned ethnic groups such as Jews to a second-class status that would be politically realised in measures such as the *numerus clausus* introduced in Hungary already in 1920 and the increasingly repressive anti-Jewish legislation of 1938–45.
- Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity), an artistic tendency in visual arts and literature in Germany in the 1920s; emphasised a photographic registration of the surface of appearance and, in the literary domain, the documentary registration of facts.
- Nexö, Martin Andersen (1869–1954), Danish socialist novelist esteemed by Lukács for his realist depictions of proletarian life; best known for his multi-volume novel, *Pelle the Conqueror* (1906–10).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844–1900), German philosopher.
- Nyáry, Pál (1805–71), Hungarian politician and major protagonist in the independence-struggles.
- Nyugat* [‘The West’], progressive, modernist journal published between 1908 and 1941; played until the end of World-War I an especially important role in creating a Hungarian modernism with connections to a wider sphere of developments in modern European humanistic culture.
- Ortutay, Gyula (1910–78), Hungarian ethnographer and left-wing politician, especially in field of education. Officially associated with the Smallholders’ Party but a Communist sympathiser, he was Minister of Religion and Education between 1947 and 1950.
- Osvát, Ernő (1876–1924), Hungarian poet, critic, and editor of *Nyugat*.
- Pauler, Ákos (1876–1933), Hungarian philosopher who is especially associated with idealist epistemology and logic in an Austro-German phenomenological vein.
- Péterfy, Jenő (1850–99), Hungarian literary historian.
- Petőfi, Sándor (1823–49), Hungary’s most important revolutionary poet of the nineteenth century; literary voice of the Hungarian independence-struggle against the Habsburg Empire; author of Hungarian national anthem.
- Peyer, Károly (1881–1956), a right-wing Hungarian Social Democrat who returned to Hungary after internment at Mauthausen during World-War II; opposed the alliance of the Socialists with the Communists that was

- presented under the banner of 'workers' unity'; emigrated to the United States, where he died in 1956; in Hungary, received an eight-year prison-sentence *in absentia* in 1948.
- Planck, Max (1858–1947), German physicist and key-figure in the development of quantum-theory.
- Plekhanov, Georgi (1857–1918), Russian revolutionary, Marxist philosopher, socialist theorist, and founding figure in Russian Social Democracy.
- Pontoppidan, Henrik (1857–1943), Danish realist novelist.
- Prohászka, Lajos (1807–1963), conservative Hungarian cultural philosopher and author of *A vándor és a bujdosó* ['The Wanderer and Exile', 1936], an influential work in the idealist-cultural historiography to which Lukács was strongly opposed.
- Pushkin, Alexander (1799–1837), Russian poet and playwright; considered a founding figure of Russian vernacular literature.
- Racine, Jean (1639–99), French classicist playwright.
- Radnóti, Miklós (1909–44), Hungarian-Jewish poet who emerged as one of the major literary talents of the 1930s; taken into forced labour in the 1940s and shot in the course of a forced march, after the evacuation of the Bor concentration-camp. Some of his most important works were discovered in a notebook found when his body was exhumed.
- Rákosi, Matyás (1892–1971), Hungarian Communist politician, General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party (1945–8) and the Hungarian Working People's Party (1948–56). Rákosi was the leading Communist politician of the postwar coalition-government in Hungary and the principal power in the Stalinist dictatorship that emerged from it.
- Révai, József (1888–1959), Hungarian poet who in his youth was associated with the avant-garde around Lajos Kassák; helped found the Hungarian Communist Party at the end of World-War I and was a key intellectual in the Hungarian emigration in the USSR during the 1930s and the war-years; was a leading figure in Hungary after World-War II; had special authority in cultural matters in the Stalinist dictatorship in Hungary from 1949 to 1953.
- Rickert, Heinrich (1863–1936), German neo-Kantian philosopher.
- Robespierre, Maximilien de (1758–94), French revolutionary, leading figure on the Committee of Public Safety during the Terror of 1793–4; arrested and executed in 1794.
- Rolland, Romain (1866–1944), French novelist, dramatist, and pacifist.
- Rosenberg, Alfred (1893–1946), Nazi philosopher and ideologist; best known for his book, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*; appointed head of the Reich's Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712–78), French philosopher, writer, composer, political thinker, and foundational figure in the development of European romanticism.
- Schiller, Friedrich (1759–1805), poet, playwright, and philosopher of the German classical period.
- Schöpfung, Aladár (1872–1950), Hungarian writer and literary historian, a leading critic with the progressive modernist periodical *Nyugat* ['The West'].
- Saltykov-Shchedrin, Mikhail (1826–89), Russian satirist.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792–1822), English romantic poet.
- Sinclair, Upton (1878–1968), American social activist and naturalist novelist.
- Sinka, István (1897–1969), Hungarian populist poet and writer.
- Smith, Adam (1723–90), Scottish philosopher and political economist, author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).
- Sorel, Georges (1847–1922), French philosopher and theorist of syndicalism; author of *Reflections on Violence* (1908).
- Söter, István (1913–88), Hungarian writer and literary historian.
- Spengler, Oswald (1880–1936), German philosopher of history and cultural critic; popularly recognised for his pes-



- simistic philosophy of history developed in *The Decline of the West* (1918).
- Spinoza, Baruch (1632–77), Dutch philosopher.
- Stalin, Joseph (1878–1953), Russian revolutionary born in Georgia; first General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee from 1922 to 1953.
- Szabad Szó* ['Free Word'], political daily dating back to 1893; after World-War II (April 1945 to February 1952), the central paper of the Hungary's National Peasants' Party.
- Szabó, Dezső (1879–1945), Hungarian novelist influential in the interwar period for his peasant-novel, *The Village Swept Away* (1919), and his vehemently anti-semitic and anti-German views.
- Szabó, László Cs[ekfe]lvi (1905–84), Hungarian economist and essayist, writing primarily from abroad.
- Szabó, Pál (1893–1970), Hungarian writer, especially on peasant- and village-themes.
- Szálasi, Ferenc (1897–1946), leader of the Hungarian Nazi-collaborationist Arrow Cross movement.
- Széchenyi, István (1791–1860), Hungarian statesman and reformer.
- Szekfi, Gyula (1883–1955), Hungarian conservative historian and publicist; his *Három nemzedék* ['Three Generations', 1920] played a key role in the ideology of the counter-revolutionary interwar period, following the collapse of the 1918–19 revolutions; was anti-German despite his strong ideological ties to the counter-revolutionary governments of interwar Hungary.
- Szép Szó*, ['Beautiful Word'], an independent-left, anti-fascist literary journal edited between March 1936 and 1939 by the poet József Attila along with the journalists Pál Ignóty and Ferenc Fejtő.
- Szerb, Antal (1901–45), Hungarian literary historian, translator, and novelist; author of *A magyar irodalom története* ['History of Hungarian Literature', 1934] and *A világirodalom története* ['History of World Literature', 1941].
- Taine, Hippolyte (1828–93), French critic, historian, and major theoretician of naturalism.
- Tintoretto, Jacopo (1518–98), Italian Renaissance painter.
- Tisza, István (1861–1918), conservative Hungarian politician; Prime Minister from 1903–5 and 1913–17; survived one assassination-attempt only to be killed by soldiers during the October 1918 'Chrysanthemum Revolution' that briefly brought a democratic republic to power after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.
- Toldy, Ferenc (1805–75), Hungarian literary historian and critic.
- Tolnai, Lajos (1837–1902), Hungarian writer and journalist.
- Uspensky, Gleb (1843–1902), Russian writer.
- Vajda, János (1827–97), Hungarian poet.
- Vajda, Lajos (1908–41), Hungarian avant-garde painter and important influence on the postwar 'European School' painters, who were the major practitioners of abstract and surrealist-influenced art in Hungary after World War II.
- Vas, István (1910–91), Hungarian poet associated with both the avant-garde circle of Lajos Kassák and the more moderate 'urbanist' modernism of *Nyugat*.
- Veres, Péter (1897–1970), writer and politician in the radical plebeian wing of the Hungarian populist movement.
- Vörösmarty, Mihály (1800–55), important Hungarian romantic poet and dramatist.
- Weinert, Erich (1890–1953), German Social-Democratic and Communist poet.
- Winckelmann, Johann Joachim (1717–68), German art-historian and theorist of antiquity.
- Zola, Émile (1840–1902), French novelist and leading figure in French literary naturalism; the central literary protagonist of the Left in the Dreyfus affair.
- Zolnai, Béla (1890–1969), Hungarian literary historian.
- Zrinyi, Miklós (1620–64), Hungarian 'poet-warlord' and the most outstanding figure of the Zrinyi Hungarian and Croatian noble family, which played a key role in the military defence of Christendom against Turkish incursions; captured the spirit of early Hungarian national consciousness.



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